The Mangala Sutta

"DISCOURSE ON BLESSINGS"

Second Edition

Tutored Lessons

by

Dr. Ashin Nyanissara

Sitagu International Buddhist Academy
Sagaing Hills, Sagaing
Myanmar

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Dhamma Dāna

THE MANGALA SUTTA • Dr. Ashin Nyanissara

MAṄGALA SUTTA

(Discourse on Blessings)

To the Reader

This text is from a series of Dhamma talks by The Most Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyānissara, Sītagū Sayādaw.

It is a gift from the hearts of millions whom having realized the truth in the words of the Buddha (Buddha Vacana) now shares it with you.

You are advised to handle this book with great care; read it for the message it contains; share and make it known; so that these wonderful teachings may continue to touch the lives of many others.

Sādhu! Sādhu! Sādhu!

Sītagū Dhamma Series (158)

MAṄGALA SUTTA

Sītagū Sayādaw
Venerable Dr. Ashin Nyānissara

Distributed by

Department of Research & Compilation
Sītagū International Buddhist Academy
Sagaing Hills, Sagaing, Myanmar

B.E. 2551 M.E. 1369 C.E. 2008

Sabbādanaṁ dhammadānaṁ jināti
The Gift of Dhamma excels all gifts

MAṄGALA SUTTA
English Translation – (Discourse on Blessings)

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Namo tassa bhagavato arahato sammāsambuddhassa.

Veneration to the Exalted One, the Homage-Worthy,
the Perfectly Self-Enlightened.

The Buddha is an *Arahat* and he is worthy of the highest veneration. All beings including *devas* and *brahmās* venerate the Buddha because the Buddha is the Supreme One, who has extinguished all defilements, who has become perfectly self-enlightened through the realization of the Four *Ariya* Truths, and who is endowed with the six great qualities of glory, namely, *Issarya* (supremacy), *Dhamma* (knowledge of the path to *Nibbāna*), *Yassa* (fame and following), *Sirī* (noble appearance), *Kāma* (power of accomplishment) and *Payatta* (diligent mindfulness).

Sītagū International Buddhist Academy

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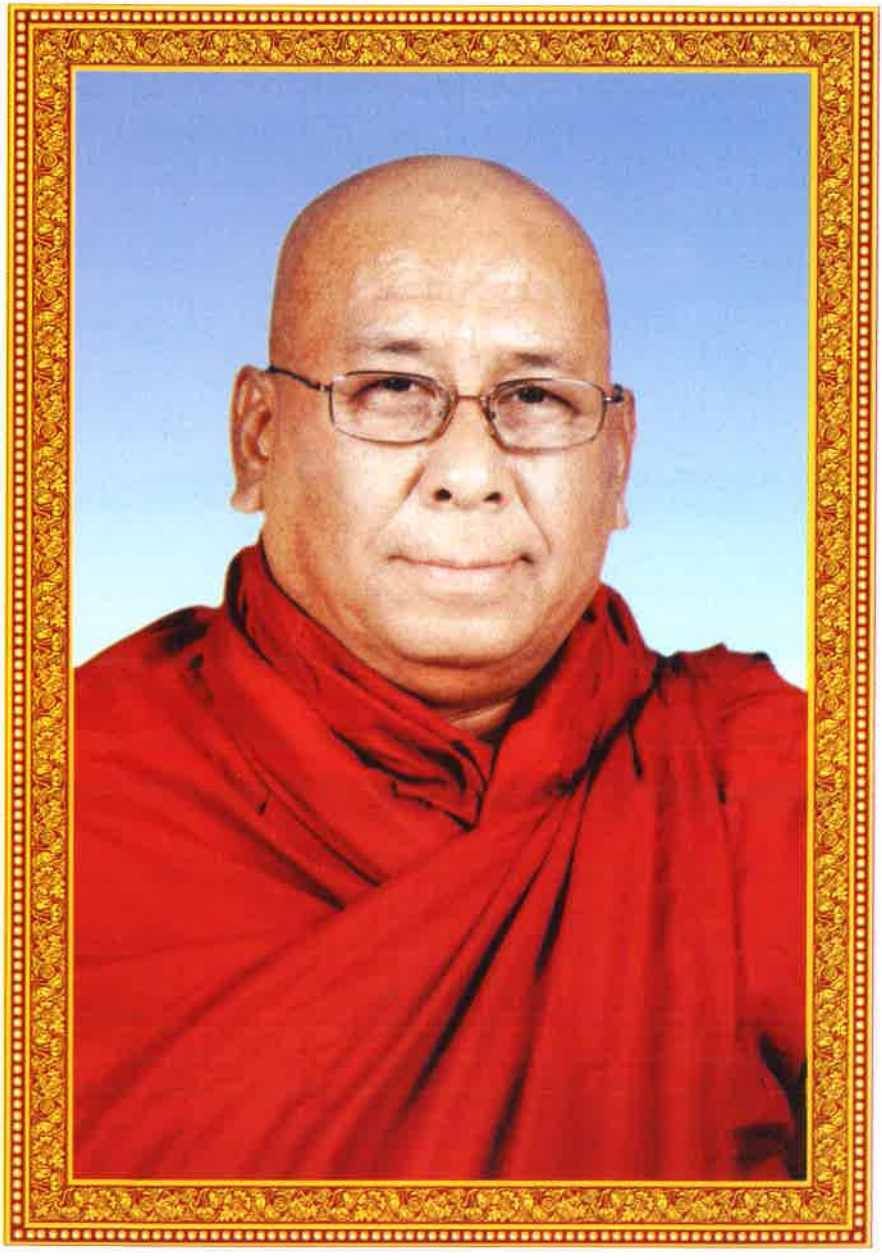

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(D.Litt, Ph.D)

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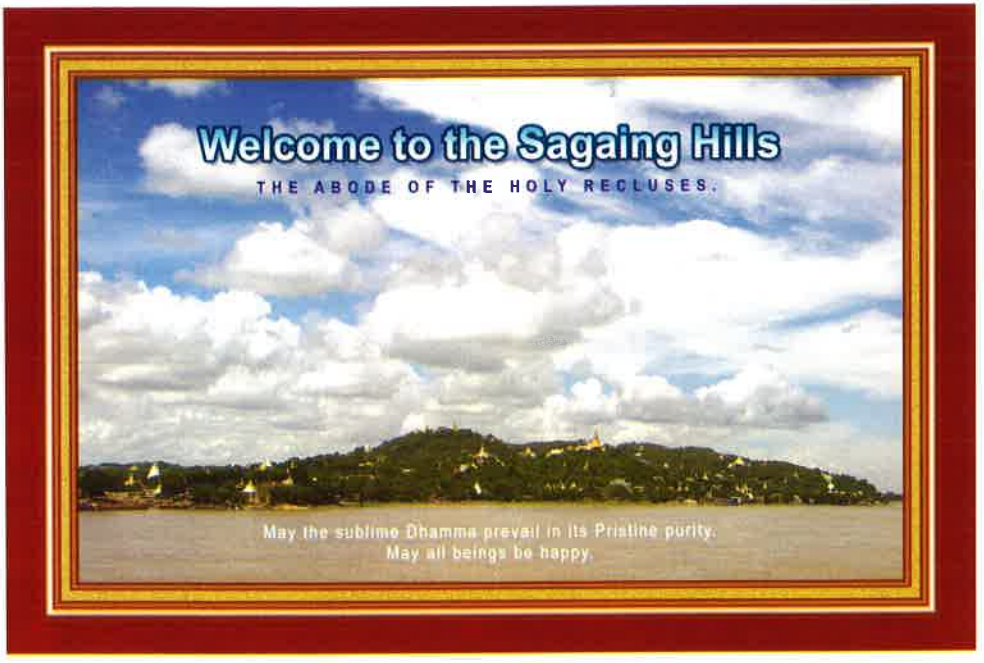
Sagaing Hills, Sagaing, Myanmar


Welcome to the Sagaing Hills
THE ABODE OF THE HOLY RECLUSES.
May the sublime Dhamma prevail in its Pristine purity.
May all beings be happy.

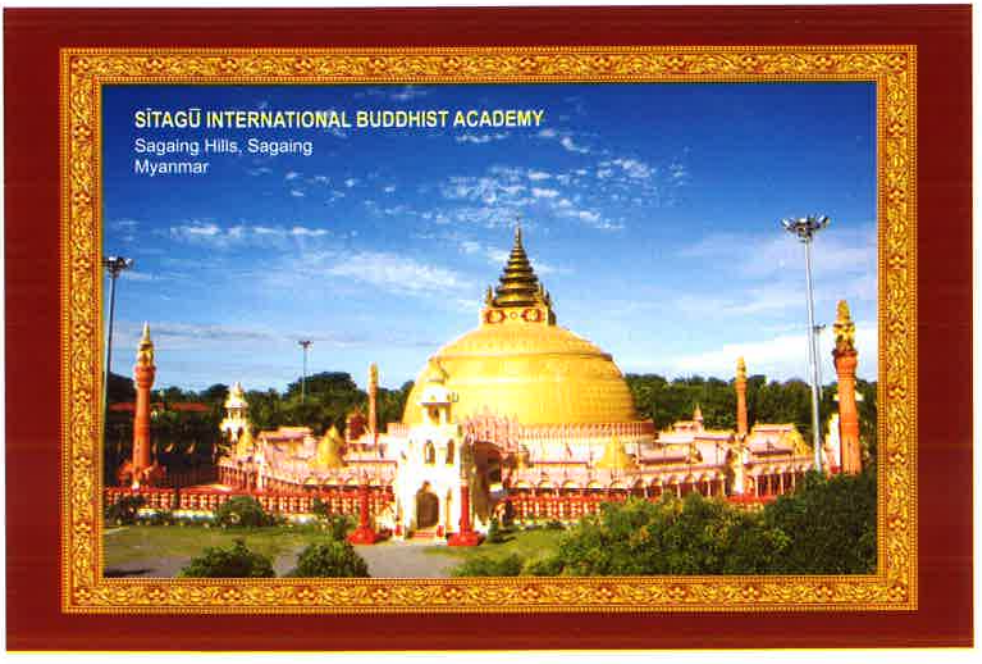

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Table of Contents

No.	Titles	Page
1.	Biography & Charitable Works of Sītagū Sayadaw Ashin Nyānissara	i
2.	Donation Inquiries	x
3.	Preface by Jennifer S. Conn	xi
4.	Maṅgala Sutta in Pāli	1
5.	Maṅgala Sutta in English	4
6.	Paying Respect to the Teacher	7
7.	What is a "Maṅgala"?	8
8.	Introduction	9
9.	The Thirty-Eight Highest Blessings	13
10.	Conclusion	107
11.	Synopsis by Venerable Ashin Sopāka	109
12.	References	113
13.	Acknowledgements	114

Biography & Charitable Projects

The Venerable Sītagū Sayadaw Ashin Nyānissara, author of the following translation on the Buddha's teaching of the Maṅgala Sutta, was born on February 23, 1937, in the town of Thegon, Pegu Division, in central Myanmar.

At the age of seven he went to the local monastery to study. There he learned his education and Buddhist scriptures. At the age of fifteen he was ordained as a novice and he later received his higher ordination as a Buddhist monk at the age of twenty in Thegon.

He passed his primary, middle and higher examinations respectively in Pāli Buddhist scripture in the years 1956, 1957 and 1958. He earned a master's degree in Buddhist Doctrine at Khin-ma-gan Pāli University in Mandalay in 1961. He then completed a diploma course in 1964 in foreign language (English) at the Sangha University in Yangon, for the propagation of Buddhism.

In 1965, he founded BBM College in the town of Lay-Myet-Hna in the delta region of lower Myanmar, and worked as the headmaster and chief administrator of that institution until 1967. In 1968, he moved his residence to Sagaing Hills in upper Myanmar and began to teach Buddhist scriptures to the monks, nuns and novices. He also continued his study of English, as well as trained in Buddhist homiletics under the guidance of Venerable Ashin Pandita (Aggamahāpaṇḍita)

Anisakhan Sayadaw for the purpose of preaching to lay Myanmar Buddhists. He remained in Sagaing Hills until 1972.

Between the years 1972-75, he lived in seclusion and practiced meditation at the forest monastery of Thabaik Aing Taw-ya in Mon State in lower Myanmar. In 1975, he began preaching the Dhamma throughout the Union of Myanmar. In 1977, he established his own monastery, Saddhamma Sītagū Vihāra in Sagaing Hills, and resumed teaching the Buddhist doctrine and scripture to the monks, nuns, novices and lay Buddhists throughout the country. It was also at this time when he formed the foundation for his charitable projects.

In 1980, he began the **Sītagū Water Supply Project** its' purpose is to donate fresh water to the residents of Sagaing Hills, Myanmar. Prior to implementing the project the residents relied upon rain water collected in reservoirs at each of the monasteries, and when these reserves were depleted, water was gathered by hand from the Ayeyarwady River. Now over 12,000 residents in over nine hundred monasteries and nunneries, benefit from daily water supplied directly to their residences.

Highlights of the project include:

1. 500,000 gallons pumped daily
2. 1 360 KVA electric generator to power 40 sets of 40 horsepower motors and pumps
3. 3 water pumping stations
4. 17 water reservoirs strategically placed on hill-tops

5. 40+ miles of pipeline and expanding
6. Daily maintenance and expansion of pipelines

Expenses for maintenance, labor and expansion of the project (based on figures and exchanges as of March 2008):

1. Annual expenses - USD $ 200,750.00
2. Daily expenses - USD $ 550.00
3. Gasoline cost - nearly USD $ 5.00 per gallon
4. Charges to residents - FREE

In 1985, he began the construction of **Sītagū Āyudāna Hospital**, a one hundred bed hospital. The hospital opened in 1990 and sits upon ten forested acres. Originally, the hospital was designed and equipped to provide free service to the monks, nuns and novices. However, upon the request of many people, he expanded services because of such a lack of proper medical facilities. People travel from every corner of the country to receive medical care in his hospital, and to be treated from foreign doctors specializing in ophthalmology, and cleft lip and palate repair.

The purpose of the hospital is to alleviate the suffering of those in need and to serve people regardless of race, religion and financial status. A **Sasanika Financial Fund** was set-up to cover the medical expenses for the Sangha members. The fund also supports the poor and needy. If laity patients are financially capable, they are asked to donate to and help replenish the fund. If they are too poor, Venerable Nyānissara

sees to it that all food, accommodation, medical services and even transportation are provided to the patients and their family because the resolve that he set up for the hospital is:

"With no thought of pride or glory,
With utmost humility,
We resolve to make better the
World we live in,
And to promote our sāsanā
to the best of our ability".

Āyudāna Hospital is fully equipped with examination, surgical and x-ray units, a medical store, a laboratory, an inpatient ward and outpatient ward, shrine room, and has a permanent staff of seventy-three doctors, nurses and non-professional workers. Members of the Sangha, as well as the laity, regularly and generously provide their service towards the up-keep of the hospital and hospital grounds.

A scope of services provided by the hospital, include:

1. General Medicine
2. Psychiatry
3. General Surgery
4. Orthopedics
5. Urology
6. Gynecology
7. E.N.T.
8. Maxilla-Facial Surgery
9. Dental
10. Ophthalmology

11. G.I. Scope
12. Skin inflictions

In 1992, with the generous financial and medical equipment donations from Ms. Sally Aw, mother and family (Hong Kong); and guidance from Dr. San Aye (U.S.A.) and Dr. Thein Myint (U.K.) he upgraded and equipped Āyudāna Hospital with separate ophthalmologic surgical and examination wards and began the **Sītagū Special Eye Care Program.**

Highlights of the Sītagū Āyudāna Hospital (based on year 2007 figures):

1. 30,941 total out-patients
2. 3,591 total in-patients
3. 1,308 total surgical patients
4. 82 total maxilla facial patients (includes cleft lip & palate repair)
5. Weekly visits from specialists and consultants from Mandalay and Yangon who donate their time and skills
6. 10 foreign medical missions annually visit (U.S.A. mainland & Hawaii, U.K. Australia, Belgium, Malaysia and Singapore...)
7. 50 foreign medical doctors annually donate services
8. Provides medical scholarships to over 15 medical students, 20 nursing students, and 10 technical students
9. Local doctors are sent for oversees training

Highlights of the Sītagū Special Eye Care Program:

1. Over 8,000 persons have regained their vision
2. 1,311 persons received treatment in 2007

Expenses for maintenance, labor, medical supplies and equipment of the hospital (based on 2007 figures and exchanges):

1. Annual expenses – USD $1,740,000.00
2. FREE charges to monks, nuns, novices & the poor

Āyudāna Hospital is a private hospital and solely supported by money raised directly from Venerable Nyānissara, and by the generous donations from Myanmar nationals and foreign donors. In 2008, he plans to raise USD $500,000.00 to renovate the hospital and upgrade aging medical equipment.

From 2000-2008, he assisted in the set-up of over twenty-two government and non-government clinics or hospitals throughout Myanmar. He provided them necessary medical equipment and supplies, as well as injected over USD $25,000.00 in finances.

The following medical and eye clinics are under his direct guidance:

1. 1 Eye clinic in Pantanaw, Ayeyarwady Division
2. 1 Eye clinic in Hsipaw, Shan State (opened March 2008)
3. 1 Medical & Eye clinic in Sartaung Village, Sagaing Division

In 1994, he began the construction of the **Sītagū International Buddhist Academy (S.I.B.A)** in Sagaing Hills, just across the street from Āyudāna Hospital. Its' goal is to teach and train missionary student monks and nuns in the hopes of further spreading the Buddha's teachings. In 1996, S.I.B.A. opened for classes and within 2008 the great convocation hall will be finished.

Highlights of S.I.B.A:

1. 70 Myanmar students annually attend classes
2. 16 Foreign students annually attend classes
3. 22 Students studying abroad for higher education
4. 8 Students received Masters degrees
5. 14 Students received PhD degrees
6. 4 PhD Graduates living in U.S.A. for missionary work
7. 1 PhD Candidate studying at Oxford University, U.K.

In 1981, he took his first foreign missionary journey to six countries in South and Southeast Asia. Since that time he has traveled to over thirty countries to share the teachings of the Buddha, to raise money for his projects, and to lecture at many notable universities, including Vanderbilt University, Fisk University, Indiana State University, University of Illinois and Tennessee State University.

In 1994, he established the Theravada Dhamma Society of America in Austin, Texas, U.S.A. He now has monasteries

in the states of Florida, Indiana, Minnesota, Tennessee and Texas, and the abbots are his PhD graduates.

In addition to his own projects, he generously supports various charitable projects in Myanmar; an old aged home, orphanage, equipping high schools with computer and language labs, equipping fire-stations, feeding prisoners, etc... In his free time he enjoys reading and has published over one hundred books and articles in the Myanmar language, since 1979. He has published twenty books and translations in English.

He has participated in over twenty-five Buddhist and/or Religious Conferences around the World, from which he has written and published twenty-five papers. He currently is the Chairman for the Organization of International Theravada Buddhist Universities, and in December 2008 they will hold their second annual conference at S.I.B.A.

He has been conferred the following titles from the government of Myanmar:

1. Mahā Dhammakathika Bahujanahitadhara
2. Aggamahā Saddhammajotikadhaja
3. Aggamahā Ganthavacaka Pandita
4. Aggamahā Pandita

In 2003, he received a Doctor of Literature from the University of Yangon. In 2005, the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn of the Royal Kingdom of Thailand offered him a PhD degree on behalf of Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University in Bangkok, Thailand.

One of his personal mottos is:

Gifted men seized time and work
as their opportunity.
They make them great and grand.

He always says, "Running water is always clear". To-date, you can find the Venerable crisscrossing Myanmar and the globe in order to share the Dhamma, and to raise funds to support his charities which in-turn support those in need.

May we all be Blessed by Sharing in the Merit of Venerable Sītagū Sayadaw Ashin Nyānissara's Benevolent Projects and his Donations!

May you all be Well, Peaceful and Happy!

Jennifer S. Conn

March 30, 2008

Donation Inquiries

If you would like to donate to any one of Venerable Ashin Nyānissara's charitable projects, please contact:

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Preface

On Christmas Day 2007, at Traders Hotel in Singapore, my teacher the Venerable Sītagū Sayadaw Ashin Nyānissara, advised me that he wanted to update the Maṅgala Sutta, which he had taught me fifteen years prior at the Cambodian International Buddhist Temple in Nashville, Tennessee.

Reflecting back on these times, my teacher says to me, "It was the beginning of the beginning for us." I ponder the moment, and he conveys his memories though I already know exactly what he means referring to his English skills and my new spiritual path. We share our memories and have a few good laughs, and it's just another special moment to share with my teacher.

Over the years, I have become accustomed to such experiences, and each time I feel more privileged and honored to have these "golden opportunities" because most people in life never find their spiritual teacher, or as I like to say my "Dhamma father".

I literally found my teacher in Nashville, Tennessee through the yellow pages, just one day after his arrival there for an eight month stay. When I first met him I only wanted to learn meditation but in order for his students to receive the essence of the Buddha's teachings he taught the Dhamma in collaboration with Vipassanā meditation.

Outside of meditation class, I found myself venturing daily to the temple. At the time, all I knew was that the nice gentlemen donned in maroon robes had great wisdom and compassion; he knew "something" I needed to know and had the key to what was spiritually missing in my life. He was patient taking time to answer all of my various questions and then offered me the greatest gift of all, the chance to receive tutored lessons on the Maṅgala Sutta (Discourse on Blessings). The timing was perfect; a teacher seeking a student, a student seeking a teacher.

With great anticipation I would rush to the temple for my daily lessons. We would sit in the shrine room, Sayadaw on one side of a large round table, me on the other, books and a recorder lined across the middle. I posed a new challenge to him because all teachings had to be in English but he was always prepared; his side of the table would be full of notes, a dictionary and a thesaurus. Our class was just the two of us, except when there was an occasional interruption by Venerable U Sacca Vamsa to provide a refreshing beverage.

Slowly he moved through the Sutta, word-by-word, blessing-by-blessing and stanza-by-stanza; instructing different pronunciation techniques, translating from Pāli to English, and then explaining the meaning in detail. He would share his experiences and tell Jātaka stories related to the blessing, answer all of my questions, and then he would chant, we would chant and he'd quiz my memorization. This was the beginning.

Since Nashville, I'm honored to say that my teacher has broadened his English language skills and has become a world-renowned lecturer and panelist in Buddhist and religious circuits, as well as a great humanitarian, and "the leading visionary of Myanmar". With his increased understanding, he felt it necessary to expand upon his original teaching of the Maṅgala Sutta, which was originally compiled and published in 1996, and publish a revised edition for his 71st birthday on March 21, 2008.

In January 2008, we began this endeavor and the class was expanded to include Venerable Ashin Sopāka (an American monk) as we were both in residence at Sītagū International Buddhist Academy in Sagaing Hills, Myanmar. Rare is the best word to describe the opportunity to have such an English tutorial of any teaching from Sayadaw, while golden best described the location.

We'd gather on the extended balcony of the lecture hall. The scene was spectacular as the gilded Ponnyashin Pagoda sits atop Sagaing Hills overlooking the Academy. The great convocation hall, with its golden umbrella, was under-construction, student monks and nuns were preparing for exams, puppies played and pigeons cooed. Captivated, U Sopāka and I sat on the floor around a table; Sayadaw taught from his chair with a recorder; and two standing Buddha's in the teaching mudra and one meditating Buddha peered over us as if monitoring our lectures. The area was gated off to prevent the throng of visitors from disturbing us.

Sayadaw taught us only the thirty-eight blessings; one or two stanzas a day depending upon his schedule. Having compiled and cross-referenced materials, he went through the commentary providing descriptions of each stanza with personal stories to match.

As always, our teacher assisted us in the teachings by being a "bridge of knowledge" to aid our understanding of the Buddha's Dhamma. Our class was very interactive as he guided us on how to practice these blessings in our daily life, irrespective of which country, with its unique culture, customs, traditions and languages, we were in.

The Maṅgala Sutta, known as the "Discourse of Blessings" can be found in the *Khuddaka Nikayā Sutta Nipāta (The First Book of the Minor Collection)* in the Tipiṭaka. Included in the Sutta are thirty-eight interrelated blessings; moral principles or rules of conduct for our benefit in the present life up to Nibbāna. They are techniques on how to eradicate evil and on how to cultivate good. According to this Sutta, a blessing means practice by the one who is to be blessed. Therefore, we can attain each blessing ourselves, through our own endeavor.

The teachings in the Maṅgala Sutta are timeless and universal. They can easily be understood, appreciated and followed by everyone regardless of their religion. One only needs to visit Myanmar to understand the relevance of the Sutta in

ones daily life. In Myanmar the traditional greeting, which originated from the Sanskrit word maṅgala, is "Miṅgala ba" accompanied by a gesture of hands clasped over the heart in a sign of respect to the one being greeted. It's also there where it's one of the best known sermons of the Buddha; it's studied in detail and memorized by monks, nuns and lay people alike, it's used as an educational tool in schools and even prisons, and it's used by the Sangha as a Paritta Sutta - recited for protection and blessings.

In the first edition, my teacher used a combination of teachings from various sources and since many were from his memory from the Myanmar Pāli translation of the Tipiṭaka referencing them was difficult. It also included research papers he had written which included passages from Walpola Rahula's book, *What the Buddha Taught*, and Nārada Thera's book, *The Buddha and His Teachings*.

This second revised edition has been expanded to include additional text from the commentary and sub-commentary. My teacher has included more of his own interpretation of the blessings and more personal experiences related to particular blessings. The format has been changed as the text is arranged with the complete Pāli teaching and its English translation in the beginning, followed by the introduction and request of the deities, followed by each individual blessing, and then the conclusion.

I would like to respectfully note that since the first edition, a few inspirational people have passed away: Venerable Ashin Sacca Vamsa, Abbott of the Cambodian International Buddhist Temple in Nashville, Tennessee, USA; Venerable Ashin Sīlānanda from Dhammānanda Vihāra in Daly City, California, who answered my countless questions, provided additional research materials, and edited the original manuscript; Venerable Ashin Thittila, Yangon Myanmar, for his guidance on life with Dhamma and patience; and Lupyandaw Padamyar U Aung Myint as a lay-man exuded and taught the benefits of donation, generosity and humility.

As many parts of the original manuscript are included in this edition, please see the acknowledgements where we remember and thank all of those who've provided assistance.

May you all enjoy the teaching of the Maṅgala Sutta as taught by my teacher.

May you all receive many Blessings from the power of the Maṅgala Sutta.

Bhavatu Sabba Maṅgalaṁ!

Sītagū Jennifer (Jhānapabhā)
February 5, 2008
Cottonjen85@gmail.com

Maṅgala Sutta in Pāli

Evaṁ me sutaṁ: Ekaṁ samayaṁ Bhagavā Sāvatthiyaṁ Vihārati Jetavane Anāthapiṇḍikassa ārāme. Atha kho aññatarā devatā Abhikkantāya rattiyā Abhikkantavaṇṇā Kevalakappaṁ Jetavanaṁ Obhāsetvā Yena Bhagavā tenupasaṅkami Upasaṅkamitvā bhagavantaṁ Abhivādetvā ekamantaṁ aṭṭhāsi. Ekamantaṁ ṭhitā kho sā devatā Bhagavantaṁ gāthāya ajjhabhāsi:

Bahū devā manussā ca
Maṅgalāni acintayuṁ
Ākankhamānā sotthānaṁ,
Brūhi Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Asevanā ca bālānaṁ
Paṇḍitānaṁ ca sevanā
Pūjā ca pūjanīyānaṁ,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Patirūpadesavāso ca
Pubbe ca katapuññatā
Attasammāpaṇidhi ca,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Bāhusaccañ ca sippañ ca
Vinayo ca suskikkhito
Subhāsitā ca yā vācā,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Mātāpitu upaṭṭhānaṁ
Puttadārassa saṅgaho
Anākulā ca kammantā,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Dānañ ca dhammacariyā ca
ñātakānañ ca saṅgaho
Anavajjāni kammāni,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Ārati virati pāpā
Majjapānā ca saṁyamo
Appamādo ca dhammesu,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Gāravo ca nivāto ca
Santuṭṭhi ca kataññutā
Kālena dhammasavanaṁ,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Khanti ca sovacassatā
Samaṇānañ ca dassanaṁ
Kālena dhammasākacchā,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Tapo ca brahmacariyañ ca
Ariya saccāna 'dassanaṁ
Nibbāna sacchikiriyā ca,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Phuṭṭhassa lokadhammehi
Cittaṁ yassa na kampati
Asokaṁ virajaṁ khemaṁ,
Etaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ.

Etādisāni katvāna
Sabbattha mapparājitā
Sabbattha sotthiṁ gacchanti,
Taṁ tesaṁ Maṅgalamuttamaṁ

Maṅgalasuttaṁ niṭṭhitaṁ.

Maṅgala Sutta in English

Thus, I have heard: On one occasion the Exalted One was dwelling at the monastery of Anāthapindika in Jeta's Grove, near Sāvatthi. Now when the night was far spent, a certain deity, who's surpassing splendor illuminated the entire Jeta Gove, came to the presence of the Exalted One, and drawing near, respectfully saluted Him and stood at one side. Standing thus, he addressed the Exalted One in verse:

Many deities and men,
Yearning after good,
Have pondered on Blessings,
Tell me the Highest Blessing!

Not to associate with fools,
To associate with the wise,
And honor those who are worthy of honor,
This is the Highest Blessing.

To reside in a suitable place
To have done meritorious actions in the past,
And to train oneself well,
This is the Highest Blessing.

Much learning, Perfect arts and sciences,
Well trained in discipline,
And Pleasant Speech,
This is the Highest Blessing.

The support of mother and father,
The cherishing of wife and children,
And peaceful occupations,
This is the Highest Blessing.

Donation, Practice the Dhamma,
Supporting of relatives,
And blameless actions,
This is the Highest Blessing.

To restrain from evil,
Forbearance from intoxicating drinks and drugs,
And mindfulness in Dhamma,
This is the Highest Blessing.

Reverence, Humility,
Contentment, Gratitude,
And to hear the Dhamma at an appropriate time,
This is the Highest Blessing.

Patience, Easy to teach,
Sight of the Samaṇā (recluses),
And discussion of Dhamma at an appropriate time,
This is the Highest Blessing.

Self-control,
Exercise of Holy Practice,
Penetrating of the Four Noble Truths,
And the realization of Nibbāna,
This is the Highest Blessing.

He, whose mind does not flutter,
By contact with worldly contingencies,
Sorrowless, Stainless and Secure,
This is the Highest Blessing.

To them, fulfilling matters such as these,
Everywhere invincible,
In every way moving happily,
These are the Highest Blessings.

It is the End of Maṅgala Sutta.

Paying Respect to the Teacher

The first task in learning the Buddha's teaching is paying respect to our teacher — the Buddha — by repeating three times an ancient technique:

Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammā-Sambuddhassa

Homage to Him, The Exalted One,
The Worthy One, The Fully Enlightened One.

The reason we repeat the passage three times is because the Buddha possessed three distinguishing qualities: He was exalted, worthy and fully enlightened. It was under a Bodhi-tree in Bodhagaya, India that the Buddha defeated his internal and external enemies and attained that supreme state of perfection, full enlightenment or omniscience. The Buddha is our teacher. He demonstrated that man (not an external god) is the master of his own life and through his own efforts self-realization of Nibbāna can be attained. Therefore, before each lesson we should pay our deep respect and veneration to our teacher as He possessed countless numbers of worthy qualities and showed us the path to Nibbāna.

What is a "Maṅgala"?

The word "Maṅgala" is often translated into English to mean blessing or auspiciousness. However, it's very important that prior to starting our journey on the path up the "Maṅgala Mountain" that we understand exactly what the Buddha meant by the meaning of Maṅgala.

According to the Buddha, Maṅgala has two meanings:

1. To remove all evil deeds, evil speech and evil thoughts from within us.
2. To accumulate all good deeds, good speech and good thoughts from within us.

I believe everyone is searching for happiness, peace and prosperity in their lifetime. In order to have this we must accumulate good deeds, speech and thoughts. By removing evil we can gain such happiness. However, if we are unable to remove such evil we will not gain happiness because evil deeds, speech and thoughts produce suffering and sorrow. This is the Buddha's meaning of "Maṅgala" which I will expand upon further in this book.

This Buddhist blessing, is quite different then a Christian, Muslim, Hindu or any other religion's blessing because this blessing doesn't depend upon a "God" or a superficial blessing from the external world, rather it depends upon us. We have

great powers to produce and overcome good or evil ourselves. In brief, good spirit produces blessings while evil spirit does not. This is the meaning of "Buddhist Maṅgala".

Introduction

In the introduction, "Thus, I have heard. On one occasion the Exalted One...addressed...in verse thus..." are not the words of the Buddha. Rather, they are the words of Venerable Ānanda, who reported this particular Sutta at the First Great Sangha Council.

When the Buddha was fifty-five years old, Venerable Ānanda became his prominent personal attendant. For twenty-five years he served his teacher faithfully and accompanied Him at his side wherever he traveled. Ānanda had the opportunity to hear all His teachings, and he collected and memorized eighty-four thousand units of teachings in all. Among the disciples of the Buddha, Ānanda was ranked foremost in knowledge, retentive memory, good behavior, steadfastness and ministering care.

It was this final counsel, which the Buddha gave to Ānanda, before entering Parinibbāna, that Ānanda took to heart: "Ānanda, you served me well. Do not grieve. Though I disappear from this world, my teachings will live forever as your teacher. Follow my instruction, keep the teachings and precepts diligently, and find perfect enlightenment as soon

as possible." Then at the age of eighty, in the early hours on the Visākha full moon day in 543 B.C. in Kusinārā, the Buddha attained final extinction.

While the Teacher is gone, the Exalted One's Teachings (Dhamma) and Disciplines (Vinaya) remain. This is because three months after the demise of Lord Buddha, a great convocation was held to rehearse the teachings and disciplines as originally taught by the Buddha.

Mahā Kassapa Thera, the senior elder of the Sangha community, organized and presided over an assembly of five hundred arahant monks in the First Sangha Council, held at Rajagiri, Magadha State in India. There they systematically arranged the Buddha's teaching into the discourses (Suttas), rules and regulations for the Sangha (Vinaya) and ultimate realities/truths (Abhidhamma).

In this First Great Sangha Council Venerable Mahā Kassapa Thera asked, "O Venerable Ānanda, tell us all about how the Maṅgala Sutta was delivered, by whom it was delivered, where delivered, and to whom delivered." Ānanda replied, "Evaṁ me sutaṁ..." to show that thus it was by him that this teaching by the Buddha was heard. It was taught to a certain deity in Sāvatthi, when the Exalted One was dwelling at the monastery of Anāthapindika in Jeta's Grove near Sāvatthi.

Anāthapindika, a wealthy and pious lay disciple and donor of the Lord Buddha resided in the city of Sāvatthi. His birth name was Sudatta, but after his conversion to Buddhism, Anāthapindika became his honorific name. A man of compassion and free from avarice, he constantly gave food to helpless people, thus was known as the "feeder of the forlorn".

Anāthapindika bought a pleasant grove from Prince Jeta, the son of the King of Kosala, by covering the grove with one hundred eighty million gold pieces as a purchasing price. He then erected monasteries which housed at least one thousand monks. It was in this grove that the Buddha spent the greater part of his life.

Throughout India at the time of the Buddha countless numbers of people, whether kings or peasants, these people from across various social levels would gather together in large halls to debate the answer to: "What is the highest blessing (Maṅgala)?"

One might say that if we see sunshine when we wake-up in the morning or if a bird is singing a sweet song, this is a blessing. When we see a beautiful blossoming flower which has a sweet smell today, it is a very good blessing. However, if we wake-up in the morning to see a beggar, garbage or something disgusting, this is unpleasant; therefore, it is not a blessing. According to their respective opinions, many people

spoke about blessings in many different ways: as beautiful and peaceful objects to see or hear, or sweet and pleasant smells, sounds, tastes and touches. However, they were speaking about false blessings according to their senses only, not real blessings.

Many rumors began and the speculation of what a real blessing was spread from the human world throughout ten thousand world systems up to the deities. A deity is a type of god. Turmoil arose and both men and gods were so divided in their opinions that three factions arose and twelve years passed by. The deities, however, could not rest until this controversial point was settled. Thus, they approached their leader, Sakka, the ruler of gods, for wisdom. Since the Buddha was living in the human realm, a certain god was chosen to approach the Buddha to attain an answer on the "meaning of Maṅgala".

After the first watch at midnight, the deity, wanting to maintain anonymity, approached the Buddha. This deity's splendor (referring to the beauty of his skin) radiated a glow, like that of a full moon or sun, over the entire Jeta Grove. After nearing the Buddha and paying homage, the deity stood at one side. It is important to note that there are six factors concerning appropriate places to sit or stand: neither too near nor too far, neither behind nor face to face, and neither at a higher place nor upwind.

Standing thus, he said that there were many gods and men speculating on blessings which they hoped would bring them safety, and to please tell them the highest blessing. When the Buddha heard this request he replied with ten stanzas consisting of thirty-eight blessings to teach both gods and humans rules of conduct for their benefit in the present up to attainment of Nibbāna. The thirty-eight blessings are as follows.

The Thirty-Eight Highest Blessings

The First Highest Blessing: *"Not to associate with fools".*

Here you must understand exactly what "fool" or "foolish" means.

First, I'd like to explain according to the Bāla Paṇḍitā Sutta. There are three types of foolish people: one who does evil; one who speaks evil speech; one who thinks evil thoughts, and there are ten kinds of evil (bad) actions which comprise these three categories:

1. Killing living beings is evil.
2. Stealing things not given by the owners is evil.
3. Sexual misconduct is evil.
4. Speaking lies is evil.
5. Back-biting is evil.
6. Harsh language is evil.
7. Frivolous speech is evil.

8. Covetousness is evil.
9. Ill-will is evil.
10. Wrong view is evil.

An evil doer is one who physically harms or disturbs other people or animals (actually it refers to any living being) through the offenses of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. An evil speaker is a person whose verbal actions confer suffering to others by telling lies, back-biting, speaking harshly and frivolously. An evil thinker is a person thinking with ill-will and wrong view.

You may ask why someone would think evil thoughts on how to kill someone or steal their property, or why they would want to cause any disturbance to others at all. You may also ask why they would speak in a useless manner with frivolous, harsh, vain, dishonest speech which benefits neither themselves nor others.

These evil actions occur because of greed, hatred and delusion which lie latent in our mind. A fool simply can not distinguish between good and evil, right and wrong, and truths (Dhamma) and untruths (Adhamma). He lives without rules and regulations as he cannot control his untrained and undisciplined mind, and being full of pride he is easy to lose his temper. He may even commit and encourage others in acts of evil, and because he doesn't understand the consequences of his actions he will continue doing them.

So you see that the fool wrongly understands and thinks the exact opposite, they think evil actions, speech and thoughts are actually good, some even think such acts of evil will make them famous. But, let me point out how being famous versus being notorious is quite different.

Take for example, the school shootings in the United States. These gunmen wanted to be famous, so they entered their school or university campus and went on a shooting spree killing many innocent people. As the news of the tragedy spread it made national as well as international headlines. Knowing that their actions would make headlines, these murderers felt satisfied knowing that their photos and information would spread around world, but as they committed acts of evil they did not become famous, rather they became notorious.

When evil news is spread throughout the world, it's known differently than if it was good news, so we must understand the difference, and encourage our networks to show more newsworthy information. So, if you want to become famous throughout the world, then you must have good actions, speech and thoughts.

Don't be fooled by the fool, sometimes he is like a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is the fool who thinks he is wiser, smarter and better then everyone else but actually it is the fool that brings destruction, fear and peril in his wake. Not only does

he cause suffering to himself but also to his family, friends and others as well because he cannot live harmoniously and happily in society.

There are very educated people but they possess no morality; they can be called educated bad hearts. Usually these people are the most dangerous for society, nations and the world because of their lack of morality. For example, hiding under an appearance of an educated powerful leader wanting peace and happiness throughout the world, the fool plunders others for his own personal interests.

When I was in Darwin, Australia, I visited ancient aboriginal caves to look at paintings. As I was looking around a frog jumped from a crevasse. Strangely enough it was red frog and as I investigated further I could see that the soil and walls of the cave were also red. As I ventured further through the cave I came upon a small pond that had accumulated from water dripping in from above. The water was full of algae and green in color. Using my walking stick I stirred the water and another frog jumped out but this one was green. You see, because of their environment, these animals' skin color changed to adapt accordingly.

In the same way you must correctly choose your environment and the people that you associate with. You wouldn't want live next to a garbage dump if the disgusting smells are always entering your home, and disturbing your senses. Though you

may never go to the dump, the smell still enters your surrounding environment. Not only will your clothing smell bad but so will you, and it will cause great suffering to you and everyone nearby. So you should stay away from foolish people just as you would stay away from the garbage dump because just like the frog you too may become a product of your environment.

Therefore, you must truly understand who a foolish person is and stay away from them because their evil actions can influence you. However, sometimes you may not be able to avoid such stupid kinds of people. You may not become foolish just by being around them for a short period of time but you may feel mental suffering by being uncomfortable, uneasy and disturbed by their presence, and you may receive a bad name just by mere association. However, the longer you are around them the more susceptible you are to lose your physical, verbal and mental discipline, and this does not bring you blessings.

The Second Highest Blessing: *"To associate with the wise".*

There are three types of wise people: one who does wisely; one who speaks with good speech; one who thinks good thoughts, and there are ten kinds of wise (good) profitable actions which comprise these three categories.

1. Abstaining from killing living beings is good.
2. Abstaining from stealing things not given by the owners is good.

3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct is good.
4. Abstaining from speaking lies is good.
5. Abstaining from back-biting is good.
6. Abstaining from harsh language is good.
7. Abstaining from frivolous speech is good.
8. Abstaining from covetousness is good.
9. Abstaining from ill-will is good.
10. Abstaining from wrong view is good.

One who does wisely abstains from physically harming or disturbing other people or animals (actually it refers to any living being) by refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. A wise speaker is a person whose verbal actions confer blessings to others by not telling lies, not back-biting, not speaking harshly and frivolously. A wise thinker is a person abstaining from thoughts of ill-will and wrong view.

These wise and good actions occur because of non-greed, non-hatred and non-delusion. A wise person should have additional characteristics: wisdom, good character and morality, intuitive knowledge and a good education. A wise man with his knowledge can easily differentiate between good and evil, right and wrong, and truths (Dhamma) and untruths (Adhamma). He understands the consequences of his actions, and strictly avoids causing suffering to others.

There are people who have very good morality but no education; they can be called good hearted but blind. I already

explained the pitfall of a fool that is an educated bad heart. It's only by associating with someone who is well-rounded with an education and has the qualities of wisdom, moral character and a concentrated mind that we will have the opportunity to gain these good characteristics and their knowledge.

As you see the first two blessings are intertwined because the wise are on one side while fools are on the other. If you come to a fork in the road, leave the left and take the right. The right path is that of the wise. The fool is the path to be abandoned. The wise is the path to be taken, only it is worthy of reverence and association.

The Third Highest Blessing: *"To honor those who are worthy of honor".*

In the beginning, we paid respect to our teacher, Buddha. He is most worthy of honor because he is void of vices and possesses countless virtues. We should honor the Dhamma because it is the universal truth which shows us the path to happiness and the realization of Nibbāna. We should honor the Sangha as they preserve the teachings of the Buddha and live moral, good, upright, dutiful lives according to the rules and regulations of the Vinaya, and are worthy of our offerings, reverence, hospitality and gifts.

Upon my entrance, you stood up to pay honor to me. You respect me as your teacher, an elder, and as I have acquired

vast knowledge over my seventy-one years and am sharing it with you. Additionally, as I'm a member of Sangha, I am worthy of honor, as are all of those who are ordained, and as are the lay individuals who follow and practice the Dhamma In the east, it is social custom to honor our mother, father, grandparents, teachers and any benefactors that we've had in our lives. As a sibling you should honor your elder brothers and sisters. When we pay our respect and honor to those people that have provide for us they will feel satisfied in their hearts, just as I do when I see you standing there respectfully with hands clasped. As this is primarily eastern culture, Dhamma should be used to bridge the gap for better understanding for those in western countries.

The Fourth Highest Blessing: ***"To reside in a suitable place".***

To reside in a suitable place, country, city, subdivision, house, apartment, etc... In this blessing we should realize that suitable is meant in two ways; spirituality and materially, and that wherever you live, it must be a proper place for you to have the golden chance to accumulate good, and to remove any evil, sorrow or misery we can not control.

A spiritually beneficial place to live is any place where one can find a teacher that will provide good advice, guidance and encouragement. It is also where you will find monks, nuns, and lay followers, those that practice the Dhamma. It is in these places especially where the teachings are in

evidence that we can upgrade our knowledge, morality, and spirituality. These are also suitable places because they are conducive for us to accumulate blessings through our meritorious acts of donation, reverence, etc.

Yet merely staying in a suitable place is not enough. It is important to associate with good people those who are wise and honorable, those who will inspire your imagination, and those who will provide you guidance on how to live rightly.

As students learning the Dhamma and practicing Vipassanā (insight) meditation, you are very fortunate to have found a teacher who can provide the necessary teachings and good guidance for your life. However, if you wanted and searched for a teacher but there was not one available, that place is unsuitable for you. Therefore, you should move to a suitable place and while it is not easy to do, you must understand its importance.

You know that the Buddha was born in Nepal, and the Dhamma and Sangha were born in India. In summary, Buddhism was born in India but now it's nearly dead there. If you want to gain a broader and deeper understanding of Buddhism then to study in India is not appropriate. Since Buddhism moved east, then Myanmar is a perfect place for you to study, just as perhaps one might move to Rome to study Catholicism.

Living in a suitable place spiritually is most important, but most people only understand living materially, that is, living in a place where you have family, food, water, shelter, clothing, educational facilities, medical facilities, transportation, etc. We need these material necessities to make our life comfortable and happy, and to assist our spiritual advancement. However, it is of utmost importance to find a balance between spiritual and material living.

As early as thirty years ago, in Sagaing Hills, the resident monks and nuns collected their water from the rain and by buckets in the Ayeyarwady River and there weren't medical facilities. I have tried diligently to upgrade this area to become a more suitable place for living. Since the implementation of the Sītagū Water Supply Project and Sītagū Āyudāna Hospital Project in the 1980's, now the Sangha residents get free water pumped directly into their monasteries every day, and receive free medical care at my hospital.

For material living, it's important to note that these places should be under the direction of good politicians and leaders who plan for modern development and advancement. If you run a business it's important to reside in a place that has an active economy, one with a proper infrastructure, telecommunications, air and ocean ports, electrical and water supplies, etc..., so you can earn a living.

The Fifth Highest Blessing: ***"To have done meritorious actions in the past".***

There are many periods of the past, as the word is quite broad, you have: past lifetimes, years, months, days, hours, seconds, etc. Because of our good or meritorious actions (mentally, physically and verbally) in the past, we presently gain good results. Likewise, if we have bad actions, we will never have good results. This teaching is the "Law of Kamma". Cause is the past and result is the present. It is the nature of our lives.

Even if you do not believe in the past life, you still say past for year or day, etc. No one can deny that from birth to yesterday be the past that today is the present and tomorrow is the future. If you want good things to happen to you tomorrow or in the future, you plan accordingly today.

You cannot escape the consequences of your moral or immoral actions; they follow you like a shadow. For those who have done meritorious actions they will gain prosperity, happiness, love, honor and respect. They are the people that fill their hearts with loving-kindness and compassion for all while avoiding evil.

For example, when my student first began studying under me, she had good thoughts, speech and actions. Now she engages in a good opportunity to learn the Dhamma and associate with a respected teacher because of her past good

Kamma. I am now seventy-one years old, and I started my higher education in Buddhism in 1958. Over the years, I have worked so hard to become advanced in Buddhism and English, to perfect myself and those around me, and to advance Sagaing Hills. Now I'm well known and respected because of these good actions. So we should all believe in the past and accumulate good actions in the present because it will be needed for your future, including future lives.

There are many stories about the past lives of the Buddha in the Tipiṭaka. They are known as Jātaka tales. In the countless lives (cycle of birth and death known as saCsāra) as a Bodhisatta (Buddha-to-be), the Buddha fulfilled the following ten kinds of perfections (pāramī):

1. The perfection of generosity/giving (Dāna pāramī)
2. The perfection of morality (Silā pāramī)
3. The perfection of renunciation (Nekkhamma pāramī)
4. The perfection of wisdom (Paññā pāramī)
5. The perfection of effort (Viriya pāramī)
6. The perfection of patience (Khanti pāramī)
7. The perfection of truth (Sacca pāramī)
8. The perfection of determination (Adhiṭṭhāna pāramī)
9. The perfection of loving-kindness (Mettā pāramī)
10. The perfection of equanimity (Upekkhā pāramī)

Having completely fulfilled the ten perfections, He attained Buddhahood, the highest level of ethical, intellectual and spiritual achievement. These practices are not reserved for

a Bodhisatta only. Through your own effort you too should fulfill the ten perfections in this present day, life, etc., for future blessings. While saCsāra is long for the unwise, we can shorten the cycle of saCsāra through our own endeavors by accumulating Dhamma and being virtuous in our actions by following the noble way of service and protection towards others.

The Sixth Highest Blessing: ***"To train oneself well".***

Buddhism teaches us how to train and discipline ourselves by our own efforts by using the following three kinds of training rules:

1. Morality (Silā)
2. Mental discipline (Samādhi)
3. Wisdom (Paññā)

The first training rule, morality or ethical conduct, is the observance of precepts: not to kill, steal, commit sexual misconduct, etc. Morality allows us to overcome the visible stage of defilements done through our bodily and verbal actions. However, it cannot dispel the mental defilements. It is the temporary suppression of defilements, just like cutting branches off of a tree.

The second training rule is mental discipline. Mental discipline is mind control and concentration. Concentration will clear away defilements for a longer period, like cutting

the trunk of a tree. This mental discipline is higher and more powerful than silā.

The third and final stage is wisdom. Through insight meditation one can completely eradicate all defilements, like cutting a tree at the roots so it will never grow again.

Silā is the foundation of these three training rules. Without silā we have no samādhi, but we need samādhi, to attain paññā. These training rules are interrelated and should be practiced by you at the same time.

Nowadays in the world, many people want to rely and depend on other people like perhaps their teachers, parents, boss or even god. The Buddha taught "self is the refuge for our self". Upon renouncing his palace, the Buddha entered the forest searching for a teacher to show him the truth on how to attain enlightenment. After six long years, he abandoned his search and laid down a new path. In the same way, we must follow self-training, self-reliance and self-refuge and discover our own way ourselves.

If we want to climb to the summit of a mountain like Mt. Everest, we may get advice and preferred routes from those who have already climbed it but we have to climb ourselves. In the same way, we are not the Buddha but we can refer to his teachings but it is up to us to discover our own way and walk on our own path.

If you depend upon others you lose control. Take a country which is weak in economy, money, power, education, for example. If they depend upon the strength of a bigger country, they will be monopolized and it will look like they are enslaved.

The Buddha always encouraged freedom of deed, speech and thought. No other religion has such freedom because everything is occupied by "god". So train yourself very well, for your own personal promotion, liberation, prosperity and happiness.

The Seventh Highest Blessing: *"Much learning".*

Much or vast learning refers to one who remembers and consolidates what has previously been learned or heard. In ancient days one's education was based on memorization from previous teachings. This method of learning by heart is still used in Asian countries, including Myanmar and India. Those educated by this method who teach meditation and the Dhamma, including myself, are able to recite hundreds of Pāli teachings which have been committed to memory. In contrast, education in the United States relies on the functions of mechanical devices such as calculators, recorders or computers. Without memorization and recall skills much knowledge is lost from the mind. In this case much learning refers to knowledge within the heart and mind.

Much learning also refers to one's knowledge of the Dhamma. As a householder or homeless one (meaning monk, nun or novice), one who has much learning in the Dhamma is able to abandon blameworthy and unprofitable actions and is able to maintain what is blameless and profitable. With much learning in Dhamma not only will one remember ideas and meditate upon them but one will endeavor to control all judgments that he or she makes. Eventually one will realize and penetrate with understanding the ultimate truth.

In our learning we should specialize in one to three specific areas but we should accumulate general knowledge in other fields (astrology, arts, history, geography, science, technology...). We should understand the environment that we are living in as well as travel outside of our country to experience different religions, customs, cultures and traditions.

Now you see in Sagaing Hills my water-supply project, the hospital with its advanced ophthalmologic and surgical wards, and now the Academy and the grand convocation hall which is under construction. I am only a Buddhist monk, my specialization is the Tipiṭaka, but I've studied English, comparative study of the world's religions, archaeology, arts and sciences, etc. I've traveled to every corner of my country and most of the world collecting detailed information on Buddhism, attending conferences, preaching and propagating the Dhamma, establishing temples, etc. This knowledge has

provided me the vision to perfect myself and those around me.

We should continuously learn our entire lives all the way up to death because those who are wise can never be misled by fools and can receive wealth, respect and fame. Some people retire and some people just complain that they are old; they are looking for an easy life that's comfortable for the body without doing anything. This is the way down in life, it is the way to death when we don't continuously learn and exercise our mind. After seventy-one years, I'm still happily learning and have never been disappointed in the process because it's my job.

The Eighth Highest Blessing: *"Perfect arts and sciences".*

The commentary mentions learning or taking up a craft. Two types of crafts mentioned were harmless crafts of the householder and those of the homeless. Harmless crafts of the householder involve work that causes no harm to any living being and is conducive to the well-being of the world. At the time of the Buddha this was the work of a jeweler or goldsmith.

Crafts of the homeless included lying out or mending monks' robes. Homeless, however, does not mean those wandering and sleeping on the road. In this teaching, homeless refers to monks, nuns, novices and ascetics because they can never possess a home. According to the teaching of the Buddha,

the monasteries do not belong to the monks but to the Buddha Sāsana. These persons are homeless in the truest sense of the word. They can go everywhere without attachment just like a bird that flies from tree to tree without attachment.

This blessing also translates as art and science, and since it's combined with the seventh blessing it means to have much learning in arts and sciences. You may wonder what kind of science was there 2500 years ago. At the time of the Buddha one of his medicines was a concoction of three fruits mixed in cow urine. After a certain time period of sitting in the sun it turned into a beneficial medicine to reduce diseases and promote energy. By knowing the technique to make medicine like that or by using other traditional methods with honey, jaggery or butter, this is a kind of science.
In order to be healthy we must understand how to choose suitable food, clothing, medicine, environment, society, and even meditation techniques. For example, if you have a temperament of anger and hate (dosa), you should practice loving-kindness (mettā) meditation; if you can't control your desires you should meditate on something unpleasant or ugly. You must also understand the proper technique on how to eat properly, personal hygiene, etc..., these are a few examples of the very basic kinds of science which the Buddha taught.

In contemporary language science includes engineering, electronics, computers, chemistry, etc. Art embraces human skills, such as painting, carving, etc. Art also means history,

including history of the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. As a religious leader, one should learn the history of world's religions and the theories taught by the Buddha, Mohammed, Jesus, etc.

When we are learned in arts and science and specialized in certain crafts, this is our blessing. It will then be easier to earn money and to stand on your own in daily life. Money is not real happiness, but in the mundane world, it is an indispensable requisite for everyone.

When you are educated, this is your blessing. This blessing came from your learning, not from a god. You create your life by your knowledge. A human being is his own master. We can mold our lives by ourselves for ourselves. In the present up to death we should continuously educate ourselves. Then in the future we can stand steadily on our own.

However, our learning should be beneficial to others. If this knowledge harms or disturbs any other living being, this is not good learning. You see nearly every day in the news the mention of weapons of mass destruction. From World War I through today, countless numbers of people have died because of these weapons. This is evil knowledge which comes from bad learning.

Our learning and knowledge must be beneficial and benevolent for all beings. Wisdom and compassion (loving-

kindness) must go hand-in-hand. If someone has wisdom and education but no compassion, he will be a cruel or hard-hearted wise man. If someone has much compassion but no wisdom, his heart will be very gentle, but he can do nothing for the world. We must have wisdom and compassion equally.

The Ninth Highest Blessing: *"Well trained in discipline".*

We must train ourselves very well to be disciplined in our body, speech and mind. The commentary mentions two kinds discipline, that of the laity and Sangha.

As a lay person, you abstain from committing ten unmeritorious (evil) actions which are noted under the first blessing. By undertaking the basic discipline of the five precepts, and by behaving virtuously by not committing defilements, you will ensure your own welfare and pleasure in this and following lives. If you want a little higher training in discipline you can undertake eight, nine or ten precepts.

In the Vinaya Piṭaka, the Buddha laid down a discipline of laws, rules, regulations and principles that monks, nuns and novices are to live by. In Myanmar monks are to learn, understand, respect and follow two hundred seventy-seven rules and regulations. The monks are seen as guardians of the religion as they have renounced the world voluntarily; they should not break the discipline or do anything to cause doubt and suspicion of others. As a Buddhist monk, according

to the rules and regulation, if he wants to practice deep Vipassanā meditation, he must purify his morality (sīla). Without purification of sīla, knowledge is very difficult to attain, including Vipassanā knowledge. When we move into deeper and deeper concentration our mind becomes pure and stable at that time we can properly investigate our life.

Human beings are disciplined beings; if we don't want to follow any discipline then we would be just like an animal. Discipline is very essential and necessary that's why there are laws to follow. This includes any law; government, religion, international, national, local or those of a home. We should respect these laws according to their locality, customs and traditions. If we as Buddhists visit Christian churches, Hindu temples or Muslim mosques, we should be respectful of the customs, traditions and laws regulating these places of worship. It is the custom of well-mannered people and those with good character to live in accordance to the law.

Here at Sītagū Academy, you must obey the laws of Myanmar but also the rules at the Academy. If you have improper behavior it will cause others to be uncomfortable. For example, every night at 9:00pm we lock the gate for security reasons. However, sometimes some students aren't patient; they want to leave, so they jump over the wall. If someone outside sees a monk doing this, what are they going to think; perhaps he's off to drink, gamble, watch football at the tea

shop, or see a girl. Many suspicions will come because the student isn't disciplined. Even though the student is innocent, this suspicion not only falls on the individual but all students. If the suspicion or doubt can not be solved it will cause very big problems for the Academy. So you must learn, understand and follow the discipline wherever you live or visit.

However, even some well-educated people do not want to obey the law. Thus, they dig their own grave because they destroy their life. Laws are needed for people who have too much defilement. Those who cannot control their greed, hatred, delusion, pride, jealousy, etc., will break the law. To be a good person you must follow any discipline strictly and stay away from those who do not.

The Tenth Highest Blessing: *"Pleasant Speech".*

Pleasant speech is very easily understood as any speech that is well spoken. Speech that is void of lying, backbiting, harsh language and frivolous talk (the four evil verbal actions) is classified as pleasant speech. Bad speech is neither acceptable nor sweet to the ears of others; lying, harsh language, malicious, vain, useless and divisive speech.

When your speech is true, honest, polite, harmonious, beneficial, sweet and gentle, these nicely spoken words have power and influence over people. However, you must also look at the speaker that they are speaking with truth and sincerity, and in a way that it is acceptable to the listeners.

When you speak, you should notice if it is the right person, the right time and the right place to speak. If it is not, your speech will be ineffective. When you note that it is the right person, time and place to speak, only then should you say true, honest, friendly, meaningful, benevolent, harmless, gentle, useful, harmonious and polite speech. It is at that time you will make a deep impression to whoever is listening.

Now we are studying the Maṅgala Sutta in a quiet place, my students are attentive and ready, everything is proper for teaching. If I wanted to teach this Sutta in the tea shop that wouldn't be proper because the location is noisy and people are interested in football, not deeper teachings. If I wanted to teach in the shrine room, that is a perfect location. However, there are many visitors going in and out, it becomes quite noisy and since the visitors aren't there to listen to the discourse, I should just remain silent.

When I go to a ceremony I am always qualifying the listeners and location. Sometimes the environment isn't proper for a deeper teaching, if so I teach here and there. Sometimes the place if very quiet and people are very educated and waiting for my speech with eagerness, at that time I will provide deeper teachings.

After looking at the proper place and real listeners then you must look at the time, this is very important. Now my preaching's start 7:00pm or 7:30pm because if I start at

9:30pm everyone will go home. Some preachers don't understand the importance of timing and start very late and preach until midnight. During the preaching many listeners are going out for the toilet or to get their dinner and then returning and eating, some are talking and others are sleeping. This is a bad preacher because if the listeners aren't interested then it's best to stop.

Sometimes when the listeners are very interested it's also best to stop. This is a technique that I use because it means that they will come back for more as they want to listen to me again. It is also at these times that I can provide deeper teachings or a series of teachings that continue over a few nights.

Sometimes, highly educated people do not use pleasant speech. Their speech is harsh and wild. Yet sometimes, those with little education speak pleasantly, using gentle, meaningful and truthful speech. Just like the universal teaching of Buddhism, there are no boundaries on pleasant speech. Every person should use effective speech which is beneficial to others.

The Eleventh Highest Blessing: *"The support of mother and father".*

Aid to mother and father is the most common translation from Pāli to English, but the meaning is clearer if we translate it as support. Also, note the similarity between the Pāli words

mata and pita to those in English, mother and father. The close similarity here probably derives from the root languages of English going back to the time of the Buddha which were Latin, Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pāli.

According to the Buddha's teachings, the first great benefactors of children are their parents because in the beginning of our life they looked after whatever we needed. In Buddha's teaching "lakassa dassetaro" means that parents are "show-ers of the world". It's up to them to show their children everything in the world today: the nature of mankind and their humanity, how to live their lives properly, how to be a good citizen, how to learn customs, traditions, education, religion, philosophy, household life, marriage, and how to establish and manage their lives.

As a parent, the mother and father have five duties for their children:

1. Restrain them from evil.
2. Encourage them to do good by showing and training them how to do good.
3. Provide them an education and training for a profession.
4. Arrange suitable marriage for their children.
5. Hand over their property to their children as inheritance at the proper time.

From the womb until death, parents look after and deeply love their sons and daughters, providing them with many advantages. Therefore, as children we benefit greatly from

the support of our parents, and we should highly regard this loving-kindness and compassion given to us by our parents. As their children, we will never be able to repay our parents for their teachings and support. Since they are our first teachers, they should be regarded as highly as supreme deities.

Accordingly to Buddhism, in the higher celestial world one finds supreme deities which we call Brahma, who show everything to other beings. This differs from Indian traditions and customs that believe Brahma is the creator that governs the universe or that Brahma is the father of this universe. In the Buddhist tradition, mothers and fathers resemble Brahma, because as their first teachers they teach their children how to live, so they are the greatest benefactors of the children.

In most Eastern countries, culture, traditions, customs and rules and regulations are rooted in religion. Religion instructs us not only for the future life but also in the present day. Buddhism teaches every aspect of life. It even includes social relations between husband and wife, parents and children, citizens and governments, monks and people, etc.

Actually, we shouldn't say religion but instead focus on human duty because these duties are derived from the mother's and father's heart, not from a heaven. Naturally, heartily and socially these human duties arise from the heart. As a child we must understand the quality of love coming from our parent's heart.

You see even animals look after and raise their children. Humans and animals are similar because maybe the nature of mother and father, when it comes to loving-kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy, are the same. The differences between the two are that humans possess the noble qualities of wisdom and character. You see animals never return to their mother or father for the parent's benefit. We should not be like an animal; we should pay our respect and return benefits to our parents.

With our intuitive knowledge we should return our loving-kindness and compassion to our parents; this is a universal teaching. This teaching is not meant for Buddhists alone because it is not only a religious teaching but also a practical way of life. If you like and support this idea, you should pay respect, gratitude and support to your mother, father, grandmothers and grandfathers. If we give support as a son or daughter to our parents, our household life will be harmonious and peaceful. If we do not pay respect, gratitude or support to our parents and grandparents, our household life will be as dry as a desert.

Buddha expounded many suttas on paying respect and support to our parents and grandparents. In the Singālovāda Sutta, the Buddha expounded five ways for children to return support to their parents. According to the text, "My parents have supported me I shall support them in return; I shall do their duties; I shall maintain the honor and tradition of the

family; I shall make myself worthy of the inheritance; furthermore, I shall offer alms on behalf of my departed parents. These are the five ways you as children should support your parents."

First, you should think that since your parents have supported you from the first day of pregnancy until today, you should return support to them with food, clothing, money, and whatever material properties they may need. It is your duty to nurse them when they are ill or old, etc.

Secondly, you should arrange and manage affairs on their behalf, meaning that you should do all of their tasks whether inside or outside of the home. Even if you don't live in the same house, you must go to your parent's home to help them maintain their home, car or whatever they need.

Third, you should maintain, control and guard the heritage of your family's traditions, customs, honor and religion. You may keep only the good and beneficial traditions for yourself, and disregard any bad traditions that you may find within your family.

The fourth way is that you make yourself worthy of inheritance. When your receive property which your grandparents and/or parents worked very hard to earn and save for you, then you should be able and acceptable to receive it. You should respectfully receive their property

(house, money, jewelry...) and not fight your siblings over them. You should maintain everything and be worthy of this inheritance by guarding your house, jewelry, etc., which were bought and earned by your parents and grandparents. This is your heritage, you should respect it as though it is your own mother and father.

If these worthy properties are damaged, lost, spent or wasted by the children, they are not worthy of inheritance and it means they have insulted their mother and father. Sons and daughters that have not supported, looked after or supported their parent's tasks should not accept their parent's properties.

I received many English books and Tipiṭaka translations from my teacher Anisakhan Sayadaw. As he was my great teacher and benefactor, I must regard his gifts as though they came from my own parents. Accordingly, I always pay my respect by reading them, and guarding and maintaining them in a clean and air-conditioned room.

Fifth, you should continue for their advantages and offer alms for donation on behalf of your departed parents. According to the Buddhist tradition, when your parents or grandparents pass away, you as a son or daughter should pay respect to the Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha. Then, on the anniversary of their death, you should make a donation, perhaps offering food and other requisites to monks, and then share the merit with the deceased.

In these five ways you should support and share merit with your parents and grandparents. This is a good Asian custom, a tradition for everyone, because when you support them you will never suffer or worry in your life, and you will receive good wishes, loving-kindness and compassion from your parents and grandparents.

You should highly regard your mother and father for they are "show-ers of the world" just like a Brahma, supreme deity, and Pubhacariya, or the very first teachers in your life. You see in Myanmar, the entire family lives together until death, like a big organization. In the West, many people do not accept that thankfulness and gratitude are necessary ways to honor their parents. Children move away from home at an early age, marry according to their desire, never intend to have children once married but only to engage in lustful desires, and even put elder parents in nursing homes because they do not want to be bothered with the responsibilities of caring for them. This is not a good way to cultivate good mental culture. If you do not cultivate your mental attitude, you cannot attain spiritual happiness. Buddhism teaches us to cultivate our mind in order to attain spiritual happiness.

The Twelfth Highest Blessing: *"The cherishing of wife and children".*

This Maṅgala is meant especially for the husband, because it is the duty of the husband to cherish his wife and children. However, the wife must in turn support her children and husband.

In the Singālovāda Sutta, the Buddha expounded five ways to give support for both the wife and the husband, as well as for the children. We should first study the five ways that a husband should support his wife. According to the text, "You young householder in ways a husband should minister to a wife: by being courteous to her and addressing her in endearing (loving) terms, by showing respect to her and not disparaging her, by being faithful to her, by giving her control and authority over domestic matters, and by providing her with clothing and ornaments." These are the social customs, tradition and way of life meant for the husband.

In his teachings, the Buddha emphasizes the importance of loving-kindness and compassion. In the Singālovāda Sutta it is very important to note the usage of words which the Buddha chooses when he speaks. First, a husband should minister to his wife by being courteous and addressing her in endearing terms. For harmony in family life it is important to use loving words, not hard or harsh words. Secondly, a husband must show respect and not disparage his wife. He should treat and consult her gently and heartily encourage her in all endeavors.

Thirdly, a husband must be faithful. It is every husband's duty to take the third precept, not to commit sexual misconduct. This is needed in every family for a happy life and trustworthy relationship. Fourthly, he should give her control over domestic duties, such as kitchen and other

household matters. All the household duties should be governed by the wife, while the earning of money outside the home should be done by the husband. Fifthly, he should minister to his wife by providing ornaments and clothing. Thus, the wife will be very pleased because her husband is kind to her. To dwell as a happy householder the husband should serve and minister to his wife in these ways.

The Buddha expounded that a wife should in return look after and minister to her husband in five ways. First, she must discharge her various duties well. She should manage the domestic duties and make sure the home is harmonious and peaceful. Secondly, she must be hospitable and generous to relations on both sides of the family. The husband would be displeased, if she showed favoritism to her side of the family and not to her husband's side, more than likely it would start a quarrel. So the wife's actions must be equal on both sides; this is pure loving-kindness.

Thirdly, she must be faithful to her husband. Faithfulness is very important, and both husband and wife must take the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct. Fourthly, she must manage carefully what her husband earns and brings home. According to the Asian tradition, the husband earns money outside and brings it home to his wife, who must properly maintain, control and guard the earnings. Fifthly and furthermore, she should be skillful and industrious in performing all of her tasks and all domestic duties. It is

important that she maintains an orderly, well-run home. To be industrious, energetic and active, these are good qualities.

I'd briefly like to repeat the five duties, the mother and father have for their children:

1. Restrain them from evil.
2. Encourage them to do good by showing and training them how to do good.
3. Provide them an education and training for a profession.
4. Arrange suitable marriage for their children.
5. Hand over their property to their children as inheritance at the proper time.

In summary, these duties are all based on morality, taking the precepts and ethical conduct, which in turn are based on loving-kindness (mettā) and compassion (karuṇā). It is out of loving-kindness and compassion that we should do these duties in every aspect of our daily life.

The Thirteenth Highest Blessing: *"Peaceful Occupations".*

You should do every action so it does not disturb, harm or bring conflict with other beings. It is very easy to understand peaceful actions and peaceful occupations. According to the Buddha's teaching, our action should be as follows:

1. To abstain from killing living beings.
2. To abstain from stealing things not given by others.
3. To abstain from committing sexual misconduct.

4. To abstain from using intoxicating drinks and drugs.
5. To abstain from speaking lies and harmful speech (back-biting).
6. To abstain from speaking harsh, impolite language.
7. To abstain from speaking useless language.
8. To abstain from thoughts with covetousness.
9. To abstain from thoughts with ill-will (hatred).
10. To abstain from thoughts with wrong view (sensual desires, greed, craving).

The Buddha further expounded that peaceful occupations are those that abstain from trading in weapons, human beings (slavery and prostitution), poisons, intoxicating drinks and drugs, and livestock for human consumption. In order to be peaceful in our occupations and duties while we are working in any service, we should stay away from these evil things. If so, our occupation and duties will be peaceful, harmonious and beneficial for all.

This blessing also refers to whatever task and action we do we shouldn't disturb others. Even as a Buddhist monk I'm working on the promotion of the Buddha sāsana but my work shouldn't disturb others. Now we are discussing the Maṅgala Sutta very quietly but if another monk comes in, sits down and begins to chant very loudly, it would disturb our class.

Sometime people are working very well but their good job disturbs others. Sometimes at midnight at the Academy you

can hear from a loudspeaker "HETU PACCAYO ARAM MANA PACCAYO..." being chanted loudly. Chanting the Patthana is very good but when it's so late at night it disturbs others sleeping. So we should not do any disturbance that will cause others to be uncomfortable or inconvenienced.

In America the rules and regulations in regards to disturbances are good but sometimes they seem a little extreme. In 1992, when I was staying at the Cambodian Temple, our temple was very small but the compound was very large with many trees. In autumn all the leaves were falling and we were collecting them in heaps, then two to three days later we decided to burn them. Our neighbor called the police department and fire station; the sirens were so loud we could hear them coming the entire way. U Sacca Vamsa said, "Hey, Sayadaw we're in trouble what are we going to do?" I said that we should just wait and see. The policeman shouted at us, "What are you doing?" As I tried to explain, he gave us many lessons on what we could and couldn't do according to the law, we just replied, "Yes, thank you, we understand" then they put out the fire and went on their way.

So, whatever sized task, work or job we are doing we shouldn't disturb our neighbors, family, friends, or any other living being. We must control our bodily and verbal actions. As a son and daughter of the Buddha we must follow such small amount of regulations if we are to be a gentleman or a

lady. If we can't follow such basic regulations it'll be very difficult to be a good polite person.

The Fourteenth Highest Blessing: *"Donation".*

In Pāli donation (dāna) means alms, generosity, giving, liberality, charity or donation. It is important to note that donation isn't measured by quantity but rather by the generous spirit of the giver; their good-will and sacrifice in the actual act of giving.

I would first like to explain donations from two perspectives:

1. Religious perspective
2. Non-religious or social perspective

From a religious standpoint, donation is the way to nobility and sometimes people donate only from this standpoint. However, sometimes people don't donate from a religious standpoint, especially if they don't have a religion, but still they are very generous in giving. What is the difference?

In Myanmar, most people are pious devout Buddhists and strongly believe in Kamma, future lives and Nibbāna. Many people donate because they want to gain a better rebirth in their future life, they want to attain Nibbāna. Therefore, their religious donation is associated with wisdom and confidence.

Non-religious donations are social and material donations; these would be for the homeless, aged, poor, and relief after natural disasters, etc. The donor expects that all people experiencing danger, sorrow or suffering will receive the benefit of their donation, and expect nothing in return. This type of social donation comes from very powerful compassion and loving-kindness.

You see in my country there are more then enough monasteries, and pagodas are gold from top to bottom and loaded with gems. You also see there are many people who are very poor and looking for work just so they can have enough money to eat. I don't want to say the donors don't have love and compassion but they have more confidence and wisdom because they expect benefits for their future life.

I also don't want to say building a new pagoda is a selfish donation either but rather we need to propagate the spirit of selfless donation. Buddha expounded in his second discourse that we must remove the theory of "self". A better interpretation is we must forget our self. We should have self-forget ness, in whatever we do, whether it is for our donation, morality, meditation practice, etc. We should forget the benefit that we ourselves get and instead put emphasis on the benefits given to others. This is a broader minded person's vision of donation, like that of a Bodhisattva. Religious donations are for the donors own benefit; while

non-religious or social benefit is for the purpose of welfare of all needy persons.

You are in need of something. In fact, everybody is needy, the whole world is needy. In this needy world we must be a great supplier, donation is very necessary. Now my son and daughter are happy learning the Maṅgala Sutta. May you be happy as this teaching is my donation to you. The spiritual guidance and instructions that I am providing are for your spiritual welfare, this is called Dhamma dāna. This donation excels all others and you should take this back and share it with everyone in the United States.

Sometimes you need food, clothing, accommodation or various possessions, providing material necessities to others is called Āmisa dāna. You see in Myanmar, the people are very generous. Now my daughter has been coming here for many years, Padamyar Lupyandaw U Aung Myint's family and Daw Phyu Thi provide for her needs just as though she is their own family member.

As a religious leader it's very difficult to support material supplies. Whenever I return home from abroad all of my students, staff, sons and daughters are hoping to receive a present. Even if I present them with something as little as a key-chain they feel so happy in their hearts to receive a gift from me.

Before my water supply project, twenty-seven plus years ago, you should have seen Sagaing Hills. It was such a poor and needy mountain; so dry with no water, no roads and only horse carts for transportation, no telephone and communications, and the electricity was so bad that the light bulb looked like a little red chili. I've tried so hard to upgrade this mountain; it's a lot better but still needs work. I can't supply this whole needy country or the world but according to my scale I'm able to supply a little amount of materials in the form of my hospital, water supply project and for the students at the Academy.

I want to tell you a lovely story. One day I very was busy at the Academy. A very old lady came to see me and she patiently waited a very long time, as I was very busy. When I had a moment I sat under a tree and that's when I noticed her. So, I called my manager Ko Soe Win over to ask her what she needed; she eagerly wanted to make a donation. She was eighty-eight; she could hardly hear or see, so I called her over to come closer and closer until she was just near me to sit. She felt so happy to be with me, this happiness is a type of mental donation as well. When I asked her what she wanted, she smiled, opened her pocket and took out 100,000 kyats (about USD $90.00). She told me over the last year she had saved the money. She said that she had very bad and stupid children and grandchildren that were always taking and spending her money, and that she had to keep it safely hidden in her pocket so she could make a donation to me. It

was such a sad story but such a happy donation. I touched her head, chanted and gave her a blessing. I signed the receipt Ko Soe Win had arranged and provided her a present and a photo. She smiled and then went home. So, you see many people are in sorrow, they need support spiritually.

It is important not only to aim our donation for the attainment of Nibbāna but for this present world and for all of those in need. Since there is suffering and sorrow, we need to do many things for those around us and the nation; whether it's a material, spiritual, mental, moral or intellectual donation. My theory is that the highest blessing is not for the donor, instead the blessing is meant for the receiver, and this striving for the welfare of others is called lokuttara cariya.

Everyone who comes into this world wants to become a perfect person; this is their aim. If you are perfect, you should help your relatives and friends to become perfect, and then perfect the entire world. The Buddha achieved perfection as a human being by completing the ten kinds of perfections (pāramī). Perfection here means the quality of the mind. The first of the ten perfections is the perfection of generosity (dāna pāramī). It is a quality of the mind which you can attain in this very life by donating and giving.

In the Maṅgala Sutta the Buddha taught that generosity is a blessing because it confers upon the giver a double blessing. Generosity inhibits immoral thoughts of selfishness on one

hand, while developing pure thoughts of unselfishness (selflessness) on the other.

There are eight ways to make a donation, depending upon the intentions of the giver:

1. Dāna dāsa — Giving gifts that are mean, inferior or of less value then what the donor uses so that the miserly donor can enjoy the better things for himself, or giving gifts to those in lower status, like giving to slaves.
2. Dāna sahāya — Giving gifts that are equal in value to what you use, or giving gifts to those equal in status, like giving to friends.
3. Dāna sami — Giving gifts greater in value, or giving gifts to those higher in status, like giving to your boss or great teachers.
4. Saddhā dāna — Giving knowing the benefits of Kamma.
5. Sakkaca dāna — Giving out of respect for others.
6. Kālā dāna — Giving to food, clothing, flowers to monks, sick persons, visitors etc..., donating things when needed, or for a ceremony.
7. Anuggahita dāna — Freely giving to others without selfishness.
8. Nuggahita dāna — Giving with hesitation and selfishness.

Some people make donations because they know from their intuitive knowledge they should remove their stingy spirit, while there are those that because of their greed they collect and store all properties never wanting to give or share with others.

For example, suppose you own many things such as a car, house, television, radio, food, books, etc. If you were stingy or greedy, you would hoard everything like an ogre. This is the thought of selfishness. When you can never tolerate others using your property, this is selfishness. As you see, thoughts of selfishness are very bad. We must control and reduce our greed and attachment by the power of donation.

Generosity by means of sharing your property with others and giving is the manifestation of non-greed and non-attachment. So the Buddha taught and emphasized the need for this unselfish spirit in the world, if so we can gain many advantages in this and next lifetimes. If not, when we die with greed and selfishness we will be reborn in the hungry ghost realm; if we die with hate and anger we'll be reborn in hell; and if we die with delusion we'll be reborn in the animal realm.

Some millionaires hide behind their closed gates. They keep their money to themselves and do not want to share anything with other people. Today, many people throughout the world are hungry and thirsty. Others have lost all of their property

and suffered from natural disasters like storms, earthquakes and wildfires. Every millionaire should share their property with poor, hungry and deprived people. Generosity is greatly needed in all facets of the world today.

The objective in giving is to eliminate the craving that lies dormant within oneself. It is this greedy craving that is the original cause of the immoral thought of selfishness. We should expel the craving that always lies dormant in our heart by making donations, sharing our possessions with others, and not being stingy or greedy. But in order to completely eradicate this craving at the root, we need to practice Vipassanā meditation. Rare are those in the world who are free from craving.

Happiness, consolation and the alleviation of suffering are the good results that ensue from the blessing of generosity and job of service. For example, if you donate money, clothing, material things, service, etc., to your teacher, later you will feel happiness and joy in your heart whenever you remember that you donated your things to your teacher.

However, some people are unable to make donations because they have neither property nor money to give others. Instead, they may physically serve with activities in some type of service. For example, if you cannot share your material or money with the victims of a natural disaster, you should go there and give your service as a donation for the suffering people.

You can alleviate your suffering in the countless number of future lives until Nibbāna by making donations because it is for your good kamma (action). Accumulate wholesome states now. Later, you will receive the good result. We should exercise this virtue of generosity to extend such qualities of spirit that are neither selfish nor self-possessive. It is from the evil spirit of this "me, my, mine" that selfishness later arises. We can eradicate and eliminate these two kinds of bad spirit, selfishness and self possessiveness, by donations, charity and generosity.

One of the most important teachings is the "Law of Kamma", or the "Law of Cause and Effect". Every action, whether mental, physical or verbal brings a certain result. Whenever our acts are motivated by greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) or delusion (moha), then bad results like misery, sorrow and suffering come to us. When our actions are motivated by generosity, loving-kindness and wisdom, then good results like happiness and peace come back to us. Kamma is our only true property; it will follow us in this life and our future lives.

If something bad happens to you, it is because of your past Kamma, not necessarily your immediate past but successive past lives. Sometimes we have good actions, purified without hatred, greed and delusion, but these actions are not associated with love, compassion and wisdom.

In this case it is not enough for the good result to come to us, because just like a seed of corn or wheat if we do not have soil and water, it will never grow. We need at least three conditions — seed, soil and water. Just as the seed needs the three conditions, we need volition (cetana), wisdom (paññā) and effort (viriya). Sometimes people have a very good heart but lack effort and wisdom, so it is necessary to use our good heart with industrious energy, energetic will and very sharp wisdom. Cetana is like the seed, viriya is like the water, and paññā is like the soil. Our seed of cetana must grow in the soil of wisdom, and we must pour our effort of water. Good Kamma is not enough; we need all three conditions.

If we integrate understanding of the "Law of Cause and Effect" into our lives, we can begin more consciously to cultivate and develop a wholesome state of mind. The Buddha often stressed the importance of generosity because giving is the expression in action of non-greed in the mind. The whole spiritual path involves letting go, not grasping and not clinging. When we are attached to our property we cannot give it to others. So generosity is the manifestation of non-greed and non-attachment.

I have many projects which are for the welfare of others: Sītagū Water Supply Project, Āyudāna Hospital, Sītagū International Buddhist Academy, Sītagū Missionary Center, as well as developing other eye clinics like in Hsipaw, all of

these projects depend upon donations. Because of these donations, the monks, nuns and novices in Sagaing always convey their blessings to the donors to be well, peaceful, happy, and free of danger and sorrow because of their generous spirit. This is an undeniable blessing that we can see immediately in the present life.

Fifteenth Highest Blessing: ***"Practice the Dhamma".***

Here I'd like to say that we must first learn, then practice and train, and then understand the Dhamma. Some people learn but don't practice, without practice we don't have experience. To understand Dhamma deeper we need to practice and train ourselves, this is the meaning of Dhammacariya.

According to Buddhist literature, Dhamma is divided in three parts:

1. Silā - Morality
2. Samādhi - Concentration
3. Paññā - Wisdom

Silā is a discipline to control all bodily and verbal actions. By learning and practicing the precepts, we have disciplines to follow. The first two precepts are to abstain from killing living beings and from stealing. So, with our bodily actions we should not kill or steal, this is easy to understand. Even verbally we shouldn't kill or steal; this would be through instructions to others.

Human beings are compassionate, disciplined and educated beings, unlike animals. Animals don't understand the future consequence if they kill another being. It is our duty to follow a disciplined life, and not to do and not to speak any evil.

Samādhi is mental discipline not to think any evil. Our mind is like a wild monkey, jumping here and there; our minds must be disciplined not to think any evil thoughts of ill-will, selfishness, sensual pleasure, etc... Our thoughts must be correct and righteous filled with compassion, loving-kindness and wisdom. To stabilize and control our mental activity we need to concentrate our mind on a single object. When can control or mind our thoughts become pure; evil thoughts will disappear and righteous thoughts will appear. This is Dhammacariya.

Paññā is a higher technique. To understand in detail we must learn for ourselves to understand in detail. From head to feet in this fathom long body of ours we must learn and investigate how materiality and mentalities are compounded.

For example this building we are in is called a monastery. If this building was located in the city it'd be called a house; if at a pagoda it'd be a shrine. They have different names but it's still made out of the same materialities; iron, brick, wood, cement, nothing more. Because of different desires of the designer they have different names. In the same way we

must understand, in ourselves how many materiality and mentality are systematically organized and compounded in conditional things; this is real Paññā.

In the Buddhist world to understand ourselves, we must ask ourselves:

1. What am I?
2. Where am I?
3. What do I have to do?

If you can answer these three questions, you'll understand higher education. Paññā is a technique to understand how many realties/truths are within us.

So, Dhammacariya means to first learn the Dhamma, second to practice the Dhamma, and third to understand the Dhamma. This is the highest blessing/auspiciousness in our daily life. Without understanding the Dhamma it will be very difficult to become a real person. Without understanding the Dhamma, without bodily, verbal and mental discipline, without education this life is meaningless; it's a useless waste of the life. If we understand the Dhamma for one hour it is a very precious hour, if you understand Dhamma for the whole life your life is priceless. Without understanding and you live a long life for one hundred years it's meaningless. So, the value of the life means understanding the Dhamma. This is highest blessing.

The Sixteenth Highest Blessing: *"Supporting of relatives".*

It is our human, social and moral obligation to support and help our relatives, even our friends. According to traditional customs, we have the responsibility to help seven generations of relatives. Good-will should begin in the home.

The family support system is rooted in loving-kindness and compassion; it is not a religious but a social purpose to support whatever they need: money, medicine, education, etc.

According to the Singālovāda Sutta, you should minister to and help your relations and friends in five ways:

1. By giving generously
2. By being pleasant and courteous in speech.
3. By being helpful.
4. By being true to our words and promises.
5. By equality (treating them as you treat yourself)

When you treat your friends, relations and associates in such a way, they will look after you in return in five ways. They will:

1. Protect you, the friend, when you are in need of protection.
2. Guard over your property when you are unable.
3. Be a refuge when you are in danger.
4. Not forsake you in your troubles.
5. Help and respect your descendants.

The Seventeenth Highest Blessing: ***"Blameless Actions".***

According to Pāli literature, three blameless actions are included in bodily action: abstaining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. In verbal action four blameless actions are included: abstaining from telling lies, harsh language, back-biting and frivolous talk. In mental action three blameless actions are included: abstaining from covetousness, ill-will and wrong view. If you commit one of the ten kinds of evil actions, people will always accuse and abuse you. If you can abstain from evil actions it's a highest blessing.

As a seeker of blessings, whatever work or task we do, we should use our knowledge to determine if our action is blameworthy or blameless as we should not do anything to disturb or harm any other person or living being. For example, you may want to sweep and keep the dining hall clean, this is blameless work; but if you do this while someone is eating and the dust arises and falls into the food this becomes blameworthy work.

There are five kinds of trade which are forbidden to a lay disciple. These blameworthy occupations are trading in:

1. Weapons
2. Human beings (slavery and prostitution)
3. Poison
4. Intoxicating drinks and drugs
5. Livestock for human consumption

The Eighteenth & Nineteenth Highest Blessings: *"To restrain from evil".*

Here we have two blessings, both of which mean to refrain from evil but they are a little different. We've already studied the ten evils and the three categories: doing evil, speaking evil and thinking evil. We must refrain from these evils so we don't cause suffering to our self or to others.

You may have had an experience on a bus, train or air flight, where the chair is small and you're sitting next to someone to big for his seat and he takes your space and you're so uncomfortable, or perhaps the other passenger is sleepy and snoring loudly. These impolite behaviors are not included in the ten kinds of evil but cause suffering and inconvenience to others. So, how do we refrain from evil?

Arati papa means to refrain from evil in the mind. We must eradicate all defilements (greed, hatred, delusion) which are rooted in our minds. Of the ten kinds of evil, the last three ill-will, covetousness and wrong view — are mental evil actions.

The first mental evil, ill-will, refers to the hatred some people feel in their mind toward others. It is because of this ill-will that people seek revenge against each other. This is not proper behavior for a good-hearted person.

The second mental evil, covetousness, is rooted in greed. If you receive a salary of $1,000 per month, you should accept

and be satisfied with this money and what it can buy. But if you are greedy, you will desire much more than you could possess, which will lead to further desires for material items like cars, boats, jewels, etc. This is not proper behavior for any living being.

The third mental evil is wrong view. According to the "Law of Kamma", every action produces an effect; good actions will produce good results, likewise for bad actions. When we accept this law, we will have right view or right understanding.

Virati papa means to refrain from physical and verbal evil. The three physical evil actions from which we should refrain are: killing, which is rooted in hatred; stealing and sexual misconduct, both are rooted in greed. The four verbal evil actions which we should refrain from are telling lies, frivolous speech, harsh language and vain talk. These are rooted in greed, hatred and delusion.

Since the past is gone, we should refrain from evil in the present and future. If we can eradicate the root of our defilements, this is the highest form of refraining from evil things for both the present and future. In the Abhidhamma we can analyze three kinds of abstinence (virati):

1. Sampatta-virati
2. Samādāna-virati
3. Samuccheda-virati

Sampatta-virati means to refrain from evil as the occasion arises considering one's birth, age, education, etc. Previously, you may not have undertaken the precepts; however, when the occasion arises, you can refrain from evil on the spot by considering your age, education, environment, nationality or relation to famous parents or teacher. For example, if a mosquito is biting some part of your body, you want to hit it so it will stop biting. Instead you leave it alone realizing, "I am an educated and good person and I should not kill or destroy this insect because this mosquito like all beings wants to live a long life, without disturbances by any other being. Therefore, I should not kill any living being." Even though you have not undertaken any precepts, it is at the very moment that you refrain from killing the mosquito. This is one kind of abstinence. Many people never undertake the precepts, yet they are able to refrain from committing evil on every occasion as it may arise because of their good morality or ethical conduct. This behavior is very important.

Samādāna-virati means refraining from evil according to one's observance. In meditation class you undertake the five precepts, Buddhist nuns take ten precepts, and Buddhist monks take two hundred and twenty-seven precepts. Using the previous example, if you refrained from killing the mosquito on the spot as the occasion arose because you previously undertook the precept to refrain from killing any living beings, this too is one kind of abstinence.

I want to share a thought and a story with you. Maybe the mosquito is so hungry searching for food and you're body is food, so you should donate your blood to let it eat. Actually, this is the story of very wonderful Sayadawgyi (highly respected elder monk) living in Naypidaw forest monastery near Pyi in Myanmar. I went one evening to pay respect yo him. He was sitting on a bench and his legs were covered with mosquitoes. I took the fan to chase them away. At that time he said, "Don't do, don't do, they are eating their food, my body is their food." Consider yourself, everyday you eat two or three meals a day and you are eating many animals. All of the animals are your food; you are also food for animals. It was a wonderful teaching and because of patience and compassion he was never afraid of malaria.

Let's say you face a similar kind of event or perhaps you see an insect in a glass of water. What are you going to do? You shouldn't kill the animal in the water. Instead, you should throw the water out and let it go happily and get another glass of drinking water. You didn't kill the insect because you were afraid of breaking the precept, not to kill living beings. Or was it because of compassion so that the insect could have a long happy life that you refrain from the evil action. Which one is better for you? Compassion!

Why do you undertake the precepts? Is it because you want purification of your morality? If so, you expect the benefit for yourself. Many times people are narrow-minded only considering for themselves, they look internally rather then

externally. Take the first precept, to refrain from killing living beings. By killing living beings, the killer will be in danger, suffering and reborn in hell. Nobody expects this kind of suffering by killing; this expectation is for themselves not others.

You see many people in every corner of the world are in danger; there are natural disasters, wars, bomb blasts, assassinations, etc. Everyday animals are being butchered for food. So we must understand and extend our loving-kindness and compassion. Instead of taking the precept to refrain from killing, we can actually translate it that we take the precept so that all living beings are liberated from killing, slaughter, danger, etc., in every corner of the world. This way when you take the precept(s), they are strongly rooted in loving-kindness and compassion. Not because you are afraid of going to hell or being reborn in animal or hungry ghost realm.

Samuccheda-virati means totally and completely eradicating the roots of evil. This would be an arahant who has eradicated evil things without exception; therefore, it is not necessary to undertake the precepts.

The Twentieth Highest Blessing: *"Forbearance from intoxicating drinks and drugs".*

According to the Pāli translation this blessing means forbearance from intoxicating drinks, so my commentary is that there are two types of intoxicants: drinks and drugs.

We need to abstain from intoxicating drinks and drugs at all times because they are the source of heedlessness. It is because of heedlessness that delusion sets in and we are without mindfulness (sati). Heedlessness is the way to death.

If we don't have mindfulness because of a deluded mind we can't differentiate between good and evil, we lose our foundation of discipline and could easily do evil things like killing or stealing things of our parents, or breaking other laws.

The Buddha taught the son of Singāla in the Singālovāda Sutta, six evil consequences of indulgence if one consumes intoxicating drinks and drugs. They are:

1. Actual loss of wealth in this very life.
2. Liability to be involved in quarrels.
3. Susceptibility to illness and disease.
4. Loss of good name and reputation.
5. Indecent exposure of the body.
6. Impairment of intelligence.

One who indulges in intoxicants will become inebriated and negligent in every activity of their life because the mind becomes dull without intellect, knowledge or wisdom. Consequently, the intoxicant will take over the mind causing the worst disease — addiction. People then blame intoxicants for causing any kind of evil action or disturbance which they commit.

Out of ignorance people use intoxicants before sitting meditation. They believe it will enhance their concentration when the opposite is the case. They will never attain concentration or wisdom. Therefore, it is easy to understand why we should abstain from such intoxicating drinks and drugs. This isn't religion it is a social principle and discipline that every person in the World should adhere to.

The Twenty-First Highest Blessing: *"Mindfulness in Dhamma".*

This blessing is sometimes translated as steadfastness in virtue but I've translated it as mindfulness in Dhamma. Mindfulness is very important. We need it in every aspect of our every day life, just as we use salt in every dish that we prepare.

Without mindfulness you will forget everything about the Maṅgala Sutta and you will lose valuable properties and guidance in your life. If you can memorize these blessings in your heart, you will have many valuable treasures because these teachings will follow you to Nibbāna. With mindfulness and right understanding you can store these teachings in your heart and use them at any time as guidance in your life. So do not forget the Dhamma and these teachings; if you do, you will lose your guide in life.

Appamāda and sati are Pāli words that literally mean mindfulness, awareness and heedfulness. A very famous teaching that the Buddha expounded on mediation is called

the Mahasatipatthana Sutta, which means the "Four Foundations of Mindfulness". In brief, it teaches that we should be mindful in every bodily action, feelings, mental states and mental objects.

Mindfulness is the foundation of Vipassanā meditation. When we build a house we first dig deep into the ground to lay a strong foundation to build our house on. Without a strong foundation we shouldn't build a house as it'll be easily damaged. Likewise, when we are going to build a Vipassanā house within our mental body we must first lay down the strong foundation which is mindfulness. So Buddha expounded, sati is the foundation of mind.

Mindfulness is a mental discipline needed to establish concentration and knowledge and to construct vast wisdom. When we train in the three kinds of mental discipline with mindfulness, we will be able to abstain from evil. Mindfulness is the foundation of Dhamma and it is very essential to gain the Dhamma.

The Buddha taught a beautiful verse (Dhammapada, verse 21) on mindfulness:

Appamāda amata padaṁ,
Pamādo maccuno padaṁ,
Appamattā na mīyanti,
Ye pamattā yathā matā.

Mindfulness is the way to the Deathlessness (Nibbāna);
Un-mindfulness is the way to Death.
Those who are mindful do not die;
Those who are not mindful are as if already dead.

In this beautiful stanza death does not mean the death of life, rather it is the death of Dhamma. If you lack mindfulness, you will not have morality, concentration and wisdom, and you will be dead in Dhamma. We need a foundation of mindfulness to construct our house of Dhamma.

We should always remember our donation, to undertake the precepts, morality, concentration and wisdom. Meditation is very wonderful to control and guard the mind, and to discover and analyze the realistic nature of our mental and physical body. By the power of mindfulness the Dhamma will never disappear from our heart.

The Twenty-Second Highest Blessing: *"Reverence".*

This blessing means respect or reverence for those who are worthy of respect. Respectfulness is the expression or manifestation of a good heart, a cultured heart and a gentle heart. You should show the expression of your good heart by paying respect to worthy people regardless of age, sex, religion, race or nationality.

Those who have the good qualities of morality, concentration and wisdom are worthy of respect. You should pay respect to people such as your parents, grandparents and teachers.

They are your benefactors and they provide guidance for your life.

According to the Buddha's teaching, it is especially beneficial to pay respect to enlightened persons, and a samaṇā which is one who's trying to calm down their defilements. We should pay respect to those who uphold the teachings of the Buddha. The Buddha, Dhamma and Sangha are most worthy of respect. Even when you go to a church, you should respect the Christian clergyman because they have good qualities. They lead the life of the Christian community, and they teach us how to tame and culture the mind. Therefore, you should pay respect to your religious teachers because they are the benefactors of your life and of the World.

Our mother, father, grandparents, teachers, elders, those with higher qualities and those of higher age are respectable persons regardless of religion, race or nationality. This is a natural law or duty. When you pay respect to these people you only guess how they regard you; they will feel satisfied and happy because you are good-hearted and polite, this is your blessing. On the other hand if you treat them impolitely, they will believe you don't respect them, for such bad behavior there is no blessing.

As a student, if you have any thought to regard and recognize you teacher's heart, that they are teaching you an education, then they are worthy of respect. Politeness in behavior is your character and your blessing.

The Twenty-Third Highest Blessing: *"Humility".*

This blessing means that we should be humble and without pride. We can show humility in our manners by being simple, gentle, genial and easy to talk to. A humble person is without pride, conceit and arrogance.

The blessing on reverence and this blessing on humility are interdependent. If we can suppress the two defilements, hatred (dosa) and pride (māna), we will always have respect and humility. It is when we have much anger, hatred and pride in our mind that our heart becomes very hard and harsh.

People are full of pride for many different reasons: age, higher rank in position, wealth, education, nationality, religion, social status, employment position, titles received, etc. Even people with no education and with little money have pride. If someone said that they are poor and uneducated and don't care about anybody this too is pride. When highly educated people who are proud of their education, wealth, etc., neglect to take care of people less fortunate for such a reason, this pride is especially undesirable. Two people may even be on the same level (both with doctorate degrees), but if they do not respect the other, it too is because of pride. If people have such pride they will be pigheaded and will never pay respect to other people.

I have a very wonderful story on how pride leads to suffering. Once Virairupa, the King of Kosala's son went to Kapilavastu which was the capital of the Sakkya Kingdom (Buddha's

kingdom before renouncing the palace). All Sakkya people were so proud of themselves saying that their clan was the highest in the world. When he went to the palace the king, queen, princes, princesses and ministers all looked down upon this prince from Kosala as an outcast. They didn't even provide him a chair to sit in, he sat on the floor. The prince was so annoyed and angry that they were both from royalty but they treated him so rudely. He immediately returned to his county, prepared his military and returned to the Sakkya Kingdom and destroyed it. It is because he didn't receive respect or humility, that he killed all of the Buddha's relatives.

Whether it's in the religious world or laity, whether one has a higher or lower rank, relationships and polite behavior are important. Paying respect and being humble in your attitude is not religion. In Korea the people deeply respect me. Recently, a highly respected Korean monk came to see me. He greeted me according to his country's tradition, with hands clasped over the heart and bowed, and then he sat on the floor because he didn't want to sit on the same level. I called him to sit near me on the same level. You see relationships are very important, it is important to show polite behavior, even if it's to someone younger.

When the British returned from the Falkland Islands after defeating the Argentine military, Margaret Thatcher honored her army. In this ceremony she said that they were very proud to be British due to their race, country, victory and weapons. This type of pride is not good, because it causes a

mass of enmity and conflict. On the other hand, you even see in your country when the president gets off his plane the honor guards are waiting with salutation and in return he salutes back, the respect is from both sides.

Even today, from country to country, race to race, people are fighting due to these two defilements, which are internal enemies. When we reduce our hatred and pride, we will never harm other beings. So we should show the good intentions and polite manners by paying respect and showing our humility. This is a good quality for every human being.

The Twenty-Fourth Highest Blessing: *"Contentment".*

This blessing means to be content. In the Dhammacakka-ppavattana Sutta the Buddha expounded, "Dissatisfaction is suffering." Contentment and satisfaction have the same meaning; it means to lessen your greed. According to your energy and work, you should be satisfied with what you have or earn. If you earn $1,000 per month, you should be content with that amount and not long for more money. If so, you will feel suffering because of your greed. If you can't be satisfied and spend more then you earn, you will become a slave to your creditors. Living within ones means is very important.

Suppose because of your hard work you receive a 747 jumbo jet. What would you do with this airplane? You don't have a pilot license, you don't live near an airport and you don't have a pilot, crew or maintenance team. You got the airplane

properly according to your work and ability, but this attainment is not proper for you.

So, we must be content with proper things and not accept improper things. Contentment is very important for everyone. If we are content we will then abandon any evil ideas, such as excessive wishes and desires.

The Twenty-Fifth Highest Blessing: *"Gratitude".*

This blessing means that we should be gracious to or pay our gratitude and respect to anyone that provides us benefits. In this world the Buddha is the greatest person to have gratitude towards because he gave us the best guidance; showing us the way to become noble, how to penetrate the Four Noble Truths, how to understand rightly and how to follow the Noble Path. We also need to be very grateful for the Dhamma and towards the Sangha.

We need to return our gratitude to anybody who makes benefits for us, especially our mother, father, grandparents and teachers because they are the highest benefactors of our lives. We should pay gratitude to our teachers in the following five ways:

1. Stand upon their entrance to a room.
2. Attend them in service.
3. Have obedience to the teachings.
4. Approach them respectfully at least three times per day.
5. Learn your education and lessons with deep regard, care and respect.

The Buddha taught that there are two kinds of persons who are hard to find in the world: one who first does a favor and one who is grateful for the favor. It is very important to understand that the gratitude people give is very useful for us. Whether it is little (such as being given a cup of drinking water) or great, or done by whomever, we should be grateful for and not forget any guidance, advise, suggestions, teaching, support, etc., that we receive.

By being gracious both the giver and receiver receive the benefits and a sense of pleasure, this is the foundation of respect, goodwill and friendship.

The Twenty-Sixth Highest Blessing:
"To hear the Dhamma at an appropriate time".

Any time can be appropriate for you to learn and hear the Dhamma because the Buddha's teaching are very flexible and comfortable. The Buddha never commanded; he only provided teachings, guidance and suggestions. It is our privilege to accept these suggestions and follow his guidance.

You can only learn and hear the Dhamma if you have the appropriate time each day. When you approach a teacher to hear the Dhamma in order to gain knowledge, to dispel any doubts and to ask questions, this is the appropriate hearing of the Dhamma. Even when your consciousness is agitated or overcome by thoughts of sensual desire, ill-will or cruelty, and you hear the Dhamma to remove these thoughts; this too

is appropriate hearing of the Dhamma. Hearing the Dhamma provides you the benefits of clear vision and a stable mind.

Learning the Dhamma has many good blessings. To your advantage you accumulated knowledge in this stanza by learning reverence, humility, contentment, gratitude and hearing the Dhamma. With the entire Maṅgala Sutta you accumulate good knowledge in your heart and mind. If you accept this idea or concept, you will accumulate good merit for the future. When you hear the Dhamma and whole-heartedly react then you can abandon all taints and hindrances. It is very important to accumulate this knowledge and guidance for you life.

One who hears the Dhamma is very fortunate because this opportunity is very rare. Forests are everywhere but sandalwood, a sweet smelling wood used for perfume, can not be found in every forest, as it is very rare to find. Mountains may be everywhere, but they are mere stone, not jade or gems because they are very rare to find. So, too, the opportunity to hear the Dhamma is very rare. Understandable hearing of the Dhamma is a blessing because sometimes one hears and listens but does not understand.

The Twenty-Seventh Highest Blessing: *"Patience".*

The suppression, eradication and purification of anger are real patience. To become a completely patient person, we have to suppress anger on three levels:

1. On an outward level or level of wisdom
2. On the thought level
3. On the root level

Anger, hatred and aversion always lie latent in our heart and mind. Sometimes it is just like a burning fire and causes violence in the mind. This anger comes out through our mouth by bad speech, or we may verbally abuse others by treating them with harsh language, etc. Sometime this anger does not stop at the mouth but continues to our bodily actions, and we may harm others. We must suppress our anger on the outward level: not to kill other beings, not to steal, not to harm, not to say abusive language, harsh language, unpleasant words, etc. If you can control your anger on an outward level or level of vision, you will become a good person.

We may speak very gently, be very honest and peaceful, but there may be too much anger in our heart and mind. By undertaking the precepts we can suppress anger on an outward level; this is patience. By the practice of concentration of the mind with mental discipline, we can control the violence of anger in the mind and heart. This is the second step.

In the third step, we should practice insight meditation to eradicate the root of anger. Therefore, we should uproot the anger just like digging up and cutting the root of a tree. This is the highest level. Only at that time will we become completely patient because we will be without anger.

Mettā is pure loving-kindness and compassion, never with anger, hatred or aversion towards any other being. People mostly understand that mettā means love, but mere love is not enough. You should try hard to cultivate non-hatred towards every being. If we have even a minimal amount of anger, we cannot completely love or be agreeable with them. To be completely patient means being without any kind of anger.

We should be patient and agreeable with our environment, not to complain about weather, food, accommodation, transportation or other social customs. In your home, office, social life and in any environment you should practice and follow this method to be patient. Sometimes we are very eager to watch television. However, if someone else wants silence, these two wishes are contradictory. So we must be agreeable with each other. In doing so, we will attain satisfaction. Satisfaction is real happiness and dissatisfaction is suffering. To be satisfied in every aspect or in every environment, we should be patient and suppress our anger so that it does not arise in our heart.

When you have patience, you will be able to endure abuse, such as abuse based on religion, birth, name, race, age, work, craft, sickness, sex, defilements, or some other offense. When people mistreat you with abusive speech, you will be able to act as though you never heard or saw them, and remain impassive. Whatever they do to abuse, accuse and disturb you then try to change your intention towards them to be

positive, don't complain back to them or others about their bad behavior.

This is a wonderful true story of patience from one of my great teachers. Sayadaw U Thittila said that the first time he went to England (before World War II) he traveled by ship. The ship stopped in Cairo, Egypt, so he decided to disembark and visit the city. When he was walking around, six or seven young men ran up behind him; they shouted, "Hey, hey you, Buddhist". When Sayadaw turned around to see who was calling him, these people spat in his face. He said that he just smiled, pretended not to notice what had happened and carried on his own way. When he taught about patience (khanti) he used this story as an example many times. He said if he couldn't be patient then he would have died there in Egypt. It was because of his patience and remaining without anger that he was free from death.

Right understanding leads to patience and patience is one of the ten kinds of perfections which lead to enlightenment. When you're in different countries, with different cultures, environments, society, weather, food and accommodation then exercise patience. Wherever you go and whoever you meet, if you have patience as a virtue it's as if you're supported by a very big army.

The Twenty-Eighth Highest Blessing: *"Easy to teach".*

This blessing means we should be easy to teach when your parents or teachers provide instruction. When you are spoken to in order to be taught or corrected and your mind does not stray from the topic (daydream), you will be easy to teach. However, the ability to obtain advice and instruction with obedience, respect and humbleness in mind is of utmost importance.

Sometimes people are very difficult to teach; they have many excuses which lead to arguing. The teacher may want to teach one way, and they may want to learn another way. The teacher may want to teach at one time, and they may want to learn at another time. The teacher might explain about maṅgala according to the commentary, and they might want to listen to another method. In America, it is very difficult for students to obey this teaching and their teacher because the Asian culture is difficult for them to identify with.

In Asian countries, particularly Myanmar, most of the tradition and culture is based on religion. Previously, in this book, you were taught how to support and minister to your mother and father in five ways. In Myanmar, most children, parents and grandparents live together without loneliness as a family until death. The parents depend upon their children. These children are easy to teach because they obey the good ways as were taught by the Buddha, their teachers and family,

by supporting their family. To be satisfied, we should obey the good instructions and guidance given by others.

This blessing is really interdependent with the blessing on patience. If you can suppress your anger and hatred from arising in a violent way on an outward level or level of thought, you will be patient and very easy to teach by your teacher. If you cannot be patient, you will be difficult to teach. Dhamma is a measurement of what type of person you are. Now you can easily understand what type of person you are whether or not you are easy to teach. Every good student or disciple must be patient and easy to teach, it's a good way for promotion in our life.

The Twenty-Ninth Highest Blessing: *"Sight of the samaṇā".*

This blessing means seeing the monks, or a person who is searching for peace. One who has eradicated all kinds of defilements so that they have calm and peace in their heart without the violence of defilements, this person is called a samaṇā. Someone who has suppressed and practiced to calm his or her defilements and violence on the outward level, thought level and root level is a real samaṇā.

When you visit the temple, you have this blessing because you see the samaṇā. Approaching, seeing, aiding, recollecting and hearing those who have calmed their defilements, those who maintain virtue, cognizance and understanding, and those

who possess supreme control and quiet, this is the highest blessing. Why is it that when you see the samaṇā, it is a blessing?

For example, if we see a fire blazing violently in the forest or city, at that time we feel heat in our heart. If we see the North or South Pole, or a cold snowy mountain in Alaska, at that time we feel cold in our heart. These two sights are different. In one we feel hot and the other cold. On television we may see the facial appearance of person with a gun. It is very ugly, fearful and dreadful because this person is preparing to kill someone. Therefore, we feel fearful. Sometimes we see a meditator sitting calmly, quietly, steadily, with his eyes closed practicing deep meditation. At that time we feel calm. We compare the samaṇā with the coolness of the snow and calmness of a meditator. If you practice to become calm in your heart and to eradicate your defilements, you too can become a samaṇā.

Sight of the samaṇā is the highest blessing only for the good-hearted person; for the bad-hearted person it is not a blessing. You can easily understand and know that when a person sees a monk, he shouts and cheats him, they cannot understand the way of the samaṇā. Sometimes people saw the Buddha and just seeing him was very effective in their heat because they felt calm and peaceful. This is the highest blessing. Sometimes when people saw the Buddha, anger and hatred

arose; for them there was no blessing. It is only for a good-hearted person that seeing the samaṇā is a blessing.

I will never forget a wonderful experience that I had in Dubai in 1993. I had a two night layover and stayed at the Meridian Hotel. Everybody was Muslim and I was the only Buddhist monk. When people saw me checking in they were so surprised yet happy, and many people approached me to ask questions. There were too many questions, so I said that I was there for two nights and I would make an appointment to discuss with them if they could arrange a suitable time and place in the hotel. So for two nights we had discussions and I even taught meditation. There were about twenty Arabian people all dressed in their traditional long white outfits, and me dressed in my long maroon robe. They wanted to know who Buddha is, what the Buddha's teachings are and what the purpose of Buddhists is. Our discussions went very well; they smiled and said that it was so different from Islam. When I checked out of the hotel, they again came to see and respectfully put their hands together as is Asia custom. One man donated one hundred dollars and said that it was a sign of his respect and thankfulness. They didn't accept Buddhism as their religion but they liked the Buddha's teachings very much because it is a realistic teaching, searching for the true nature which is Dhamma.

I was once in Los Angles, California with Sayadaw U Silānanda. We were in a bookstore when five naughty young

boys came and said, "Hey, Shaolin monks! Can you teach us kung-fu?" I smiled and told them that if they wanted to learn Theravada Buddhist kung-fu they'd have to come to temple. So, they came to Venerable U Pannyavamsa's monastery and I gave the following instructions. "Sit on the ground, sit in a cross-legged position, sit erectly, rest your hands in your lap, position your right hand on the top of the left, close your eyes slowly, pay attention to your nostril, focus your breath on the tip of your nostril, breath in and breathe out naturally, don't miss any breaths". They kept looking at me many times and finally I asked why they were looking. They wanted to know if what I was teaching was actually "kung-fu", I said that it was my kung-fu method to fight mentally not physically. They too received the good benefit of seeing me.

The Thirtieth Highest Blessing: *"Discussion of Dhamma at the appropriate time".*

An appropriate time to discuss the Dhamma is when cognizance is good or when you are able to discuss the Dhamma with someone who understands the Dhamma. It is very important to get a chance to discuss the Dhamma. Discussion is really important because if you can discuss with your teacher or another learned person in Dhamma, at that time you will acquire some knowledge, which is a blessing for you. When you discuss the Maṅgala Sutta, especially with your teacher, you will accumulate much knowledge, and this is your highest blessing.

When we discuss Dhamma with someone, we must be patient, loving, compassionate and intellectual. If we do not have these good qualities when we have discussions, gradually we will argue and fight; later we will separate. Discussion and arguing are different. Arguing is based on dissatisfaction; while discussion is based on patience and wisdom. So when we discuss the Dhamma or religion with someone, we should first build a foundation to be patient, very patient. These Maṅgalas are interdependent. If you follow these teachings and this guidance, blessings will follow you.

At one time I was crossing through a city called Nagapura, which is the capital city in Maharastra State in southern India. When I was walking through the street and getting a cold drink, two ladies and gentlemen came running quickly up to me. They gave salutation and paid respect three times and asked in Pāli, "Bhante, kācci khamaniyaṁ". At the time Buddha from the various directions, many monks, nuns, ladies and gentlemen came to see the Buddha and listen to the Dhamma. At that time Buddha greeted them "Kācci khamaniyaṁ" or in English "How are you?" I felt very satisfied because they used the Buddha's language.

The people greeting me had established a Buddhist center in their city and they warmly invited me to deliver the Dhamma. Of course, I accepted their invitation immediately. Nearly two hundred people gathered together to listen to the Dhamma. I taught a summary of Buddhism — not to do any evil, to do all good, to purify one's mind — this is the

Teaching of the Buddha. This Dhamma teaching was a blessing for them because they had an appropriate time to listen to the Dhamma (kālena dhammasavanaṁ) and an appropriate time to discuss the Dhamma (kālena dhammasākacchā). These Indian people received these two highest blessings because when they saw a samaṇā or bhikkhu coming from somewhere, they thought we should go quickly and request him to teach the Dhamma; this is the highest blessing.

The Thirty-First Highest Blessing: *"Self-control".*

In the beginning of the Maṅgala Sutta we started with not associating with fools and gradually we have moved deeper and deeper through the blessings. These next four blessings expounded by the Buddha, ending with the realization of Nibbāna, are the highest of the blessings.

This blessing means that we need self-control to remove extreme greed (abhijjhā) and mental illness (domanassa) from our mind. Self-control also means restraint of our six faculties (eyes, ears, nose, mouth, body and mind) by controlling our physical, verbal and mental actions. If we can't control these we'll feel ill. We should control our bodily and verbal actions by undertaking the precepts or morality. We should control our mental actions by establishing concentration. We should control, suppress and eliminate the root of defilements by the practice of insight meditation.

Evil and good, these two thoughts or actions are always fighting in our bodies. Sometimes we want to cultivate good spirit and qualities in our heart, body and mind. However, at that time, when evil things enter and fight, the good qualities may run away. With right effort we can establish good qualities by: preventing evil things not yet arisen, eliminating evil things already arisen, cultivating good things not yet arisen, and developing good things already have arisen. It is energetic will and right effort that we should use to fight, suppress and eliminate evil things from entering our heart, body and mind.

For example, in many counties there are rebellions. The government will use its military force to defeat the rebels that are destroying the villages. However, when the military forces enter into the forest, the rebels run away. Just as military forces threaten the rebellions, we should threaten the rebels (greed, hatred and delusion) that lie latent in our mind. These rebels (evil defilements) are suppressed and driven out by morality, concentration and wisdom. This is self-control.

Sometimes we feel lazy, tired or dull; this feeling can be physical and/or mental. The active endeavor and energy that we build up to push out these feelings is also one kind of self-control.

The Thirty-Second Highest Blessing: ***"Exercise of Holy Practice".***

Practicing the holy life is the divine life because it is the life of noble conduct. Brahma means holy, noble or divine. Sometimes it also means holy person or holy ascetic. In the Tipiṭaka, commentators explain that brahmacariya is practice in three ways: totally abstaining from any sexual contact and intercourse; practicing the four noble ways of loving-kindness (mettā), compassion (karuṇā), sympathetic joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekkhā); and following the Eightfold Noble Path.

The way on which we should tread for liberation of our minds is in the Eightfold Noble Path. In the Eightfold Noble Path right speech, right action and right livelihood are included in the morality (silā) group. By observing morality and undertaking the precepts, we will acquire a lot of happiness. Right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration are included in the concentration (samādhi) group. While an outward level of control is good, it is most important to practice mental discipline to suppress mental violations. Once we attain complete concentration of the mind, we will acquire mental peace and real happiness of mind. We can cultivate and train our mind by the practice of concentration. Subsequently, our sense desire, ill-will, stiffness, torpor, agitation and irritation will subside. Non-violence in the mind is happiness. Right understanding and

right thought are included in the wisdom (paññā) group. When we practice these three training rules (silā, samādhi, paññā), we are leading the holy life by ourselves.

The Thirty-Third Highest Blessing: ***"Penetrating the Four Noble Truths".***

The Four Noble Truths are the essence of the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha states in his teachings, "In this very fathom-long body, along with its consciousness and perception, do I proclaim the world, the origin of the world, the cessation of the world, and the path leading to the cessation of the world." Here the term "world" means suffering. The Buddha himself discovered these Four Noble Truths by his own intuitive knowledge. The Buddha was not indebted to anyone for the knowledge of these truths. These truths always exist, but it is the Buddha who reveals them to the deluded world.

In brief, the Four Noble Truths are:

1. The Noble Truth of Suffering (Dukkha Sacca)
2. The Noble Truth of the Cause of Suffering (Samudaya Sacca)
3. The Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering (Nirodha Sacca)
4. The Noble Truth of the Way Leading to the Cessation of Suffering (Magga Sacca)

We should understand the First Noble Truth, Dukkha Sacca, as the "Noble Truth of Suffering". Life, to one who sees deeply, is full of suffering. In the First Noble Truth the Buddha taught about three kinds of suffering: ordinary suffering, suffering caused by change and suffering caused by conditioned states.

What is ordinary suffering? On the physical level: birth, decay, disease and death are four inevitable causes of suffering for every being subject to life. On the mental level: sorrow, lamentation, dejection, despair, association with hateful person and unpleasant things, separation from beloved ones and pleasant things, and not getting what one desires are forms of suffering, but they are a suffering which can be avoided by those who see things as they truly are.

The second kind of suffering is suffering caused by change. Nothing in life is permanent or everlasting. Whatever arises must disappear. When we sit meditation, we examine this state of impermanence in our body. For example, a moment of happiness or a pleasant sensation is temporary, and when it inevitably changes, pain, suffering or unhappiness, may take its place.

The third type of suffering is suffering caused by conditioned states. According to Buddhist philosophy, there is no self, no soul, no being nor individual "I". What we call a "being",

or "individual" is only a label given to a combination of ever changing physical and mental forces which are conditioned by and completely interdependent upon one another. These aspects are divided into five groups or aggregates: materialities, sensations (feeling), perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. The very conditioned-ness of all things, including our "selves" is at the deep root of suffering.

The Second Noble Truth, Samudaya Sacca, is the "Noble Truth of the Cause or Origin of Suffering". It is the craving which produces rebirth, accompanied by passion and attachment, delighting now here, now there. It is the thirst-craving for sensual pleasure, existence and non-existence. Ignorance and craving are powerful mental forces latent in all of us. It manifests itself in various ways, and it gives rise to all forms of suffering. The Buddha taught deeply and precisely that the root of all suffering is greed (lobha), hatred (dosa) and delusion (moha). Besides greed, hatred and delusion every defilement, including attachment to sensual pleasures, ideas, beliefs, etc., jealousy, pride and wrong-view, is the cause of suffering, too.

The Buddha said, "The world always lacks and hungers and is never satisfied, and the world is enslaved to thirst." So, everyone should realize that all the evils and trouble in the world, whether small quarrels to great wars are produced by selfish desire. This craving, desire or thirst, which is gross or subtle, leads to repeat births and deaths, sorrow and

suffering. As long as there is this thirst-craving to be and to become, the cycle of continuity of suffering will go on. The cycle can be stopped by cutting off the driving force (thirst-craving), through wisdom which sees reality and truth. So, right understanding of the first truth leads to eradication of the second truth. This is the Noble Truth of the Cause or Origin of Suffering.

The Third Noble Truth, Nirodha Sacca, is the "Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering". It is the complete cessation, emancipation, liberation, freedom from they cycle of the continuous suffering, extinction of ills of life or becoming. This is achieved by the total eradication of all forms of thirst-craving desires. This is Nibbāna.

Dhamma is the "Law of Cause and Effect". Defilements are the cause and suffering is the effect. To climinate the suffering completely, one has to dig deeply and cut the main root or cause of suffering which is thirst-craving. We can do this by insight mediation — Vipassanā. If the cause of suffering is totally destroyed, then suffering, which is the effect of the cause, ceases surely. So the cessation of suffering means the cessation of defilements. The Pāli word Nibbāna is formed of Ni + Vāna. Ni is a negative particle which means no more and Vāna means craving, lusting, thirsting or attachment. Therefore, Nibbāna is known also as the extinction of thirst-craving.

What is Nibbāna? Where is Nibbāna? How can we get to Nibbāna? These questions can never be answered completely

and satisfactorily in words because human language is too poor to express the real nature of the Absolute Truth, which is Nibbāna. Dr. Walpola Rahula, who wrote *What the Buddha Taught,* said in his book, "Words are symbols representing things and ideas known to us, and these symbols do not and cannot convey the true nature of even ordinary things. Therefore, there cannot be words to express that experience of Nibbāna — the Absolute Truth."

According to Buddhism, the Absolute Truth is that there is nothing absolute in the world, that everything is relative, compounded, conditioned and impermanent, and that there is nothing unchanging, everlasting. There is no absolute substance like self or soul within or without. When wisdom is developed and cultivated, according to the Four Noble Truths, this wisdom sees the secret of life, the reality of things as they are. When the secret is discovered, when the truth is seen, all the forces which feverishly produce the continuous cycle of suffering in illusion, thirst, and lust, become calm and incapable of producing any more kamma-formations, because there is no more illusion, no more thirst, no more lust for continuity.

The Thirty-Fourth Highest Blessing: *"Realization of Nibbāna".*

Nibbāna can be realized in this very life; it is not necessary to wait till you die to attain Nibbāna. One who has realized Nibbāna is the happiest and most peaceful person in the world.

He is free from all complexes and obsessions, all worries and trouble. Happiness is non-attachment in this world. This is called the Noble Truth of the Cessation of Suffering.

The Fourth Noble Truth, Magga Sacca, is the "Way leading to the Cessation of Suffering — Nibbāna". This is known as the Middle Path (Majjhimā Paṭipadā) because it avoids two extremes: the search for happiness through the pleasure of the sense, and the search for happiness through self-mortification in different forms asceticism. The Buddha, having found both extremes to be useless, avoided them and discovered the new path through his own experience. It is the Middle Path which gives pure vision and knowledge that leads to purification, insight, enlightenment, peace, happiness, cessation of craving, extinction of suffering — Nibbāna. The Middle Path is known as the Noble Eightfold Path because it consists of eight categories:

1. Right Understanding (Sammā diṭṭhi)
2. Right Thought (Sammā saṅkappa)
3. Right Speech (Sammā vācā)
4. Right Action (Sammā kammanta)
5. Right Livelihood (Sammā ājīva)
6. Right Effort (Sammā vāyāma)
7. Right Mindfulness (Sammā sati)
8. Right Concentration (Sammā samādhi)

Right Understanding is the keynote of Buddhism. To understand rightly means to understand oneself and things as they really are. Right Understanding is understanding of

the Four Noble Truths. In the practice of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Understanding stands at the beginning as well as its end. In the beginning it deals with certain natural laws, and at the culmination of the practice, Right Understanding has matured into perfect insight-wisdom, leading into perfect insight-wisdom, leading directly to the stage of enlightenment.

Clear vision or Right Understanding leads to the Right Thought. This serves the double purpose of eliminating evil thoughts and developing pure thoughts. In this particular connection, Right Thought is threefold. It consists of: (1) the thought of renunciation of worldly pleasures or the virtue of unselfishness, which is opposed to attachment, selfishness and possessiveness; (2) the thought of loving-kindness, good-will or benevolence, which is opposed to hatred, ill will or aversion; and (3) the thought of harmlessness or compassion, which is opposed to cruelty and callousness.

Right Thought leads to Right Speech, and this includes abstinence from speaking lies, slander, harsh words and frivolous talk. Right Speech must be followed by Right Action, which comprises abstinence things not given by others and sexual refraining from five kinds of trades which are forbidden to a lay disciple. They are trading in weapons, human beings (slavery and prostitution), poisons, intoxicating drinks and drugs, and livestock for human consumption.

Right Effort is the energetic will to (1) prevent an evil and unwholesome state of mind from arising, (2) get rid of such evil and unwholesome states that have already arisen, (3)

produce good and wholesome states of mind not yet arisen, and (4) develop and bring to perfection the wholesome states of mind already present. Right Mindfulness is to be diligently aware, mindful and attentive with regard to the activities of the body, sensations or feelings, activities of the mind, and ideas, thoughts, conceptions and things.

Right Effort and Right Mindfulness lead to Right Concentration. It is "one-pointedness" of mind. Concentration is very helpful to clear the path of its obstacles, but it is insight alone which enables one to see things as they really are. With this "one-pointed" mind which now resembles a polished mirror, one looks at the world to get a correct view of life.

To understand the Four Noble Truths, Dukkha Sacca, Samudaya Sacca, Nirodha Sacca and Magga Sacca, is the highest blessing in this very life. This is the destination of everyone not only for Buddhists but for anybody who needs to understand the Truth.

The Thirty-Fifth Highest Blessing: ***"He whose mind does not flutter by contact with world contingencies".***

You should control your mind to be solid like a mass of rock; not to shake, flutter, waver or move when tempted by any of the following eight worldly contingencies:

1. Gain (Lābha)
2. Loss (Alābha)

3. Retinue (Yasa)
4. Loneliness (Ayasa)
5. Praise (PasaCsā)
6. Blame (Nindā)
7. Happiness (Sukha)
8. Suffering (Dukkha)

These eight worldly contingencies can be analyzed in two patterns. In one pattern there are four good or pleasant contingencies — gain, honor, praise and happiness. In the other pattern there are four bad or unpleasant contingencies — loss, dishonor, blame and suffering. These eight worldly contingencies are the nature of the world for every being. Even an animal has a good opportunity when it has an owner. However, if the owner strikes it, then its favor is not very good. A very good and wise gentleman may receive honor, praise and cheer. At other times he may be dishonored, blamed and abused; this is the nature of life. At times you may feel happiness, peace and harmony in your mind, and sometimes you may feel misery, sorrow, lamentation, unhappiness and suffering; these too are the nature of life. In our daily life we will always come in contact with one of these contingencies.

The eight worldly are not for the sake of god, supernatural agencies or deities. They are disconnected and never contact with god, supernatural agencies or deities. According to your actions and reactions (kamma) and defilements (kilesa),

they can do nothing for you. For instance, if a teacher shouted that the student was very bad and never obeyed the teacher's guidance, this is the teacher's action. At that point, the student may react by responding that he or she always obeys the teaching and does not like for the teacher to shout or blame him or her. The teacher acts by blaming and student reacts by complaining. This is the nature of human life.

The eight worldly contingencies are broken down into four pairs. The first pair of contingencies is gain (lābha) and loss (alābha). When we gain or receive a lot of money, at that time we feel very happy. But if we lose our job and are unable to receive any money, at that time we feel suffering. Suppose the good contingency is the right way and the bad contingency is the left way, in this case gain is right and loss is left. You should not approach the right way (gain) with attachment. When we gain money, we become attached to it, and if it is then lost, we feel suffering. You should also not approach the left side (loss) with detachment, because detachment is bad attachment. This too is suffering. Instead, you should be straight like an arrow and go the middle way without attachment to gain or detachment to loss. Our mind should steadfast and concentrated when it contacts gain and loss. It is when our mind is firm and does not flutter that we receive happiness in this very life.

The second pair of worldly contingencies is retinue and loneliness. Retinue refers to one who has many people

surrounding him or her, such as family members, sons and daughters, assistants, supporters, workers, etc. Retinue is on the pleasant side because with many attendants and a good environment we feel happiness. If all were to leave we would feel loneliness. Sometimes, when people have no children or attendants, and are without anyone to contact, serve or listen to them, they feel lonely. In the United States, many elderly people remain lonely without children or grandchildren, and gradually they become depressed. So we should go the Middle Way and neither attach to retinue with craving nor attach to loneliness with anger.

The third pair of worldly contingencies is praise (pasaCsā) and blame (nindā). If you receive praise for being wise, intellectual, pious etc., at that time you may feel happy with attachment. If you receive blame at that time, do not worry by detachment. This praise or blame is not important because it comes from the outside. It is very important for our heart and mind to remain firm without fluttering when contacted by one of these contingencies.

The fourth pair of worldly contingencies is mental and physical happiness (sukha) and mental and physical suffering (dukkha). When we have happiness or satisfaction, we attach to it with craving, greed and lust. When we feel the unpleasantness of suffering, we try to detach from it by pushing it out with hatred. Happiness and suffering are always arising and disappearing. This nature of our life is

always changing and not everlasting. We can escape from happiness and suffering and attachment and detachment by following the Middle Way. When we go the Middle Way with equanimity, this will lead us to Nibbāna. Once we attain Nibbāna, these eight contingencies will surely cease.

In the Maṅgala Sutta we began with "not to associate with the fools but to associate with the wise." Now we have reached the highest stage of all of the blessings. If you associate with fools you come in contact with the four unpleasant worldly contingencies — loss, dishonor, blame and suffering. If you associate with the wise, you will come in contact with the four pleasant worldly contingencies — gain, honor, praise and happiness. You must follow these blessings and not let your mind flutter when you come in contact with the eight worldly contingencies.

I would like to briefly explain six additional pairs of contingencies. First, there is success (jaya) and defeat (parājaya). Sometimes you apply for a job and during the interview the directors like your answers and they appoint you to the job. Thus you succeed. At other times you may be defeated by not getting the job. The second pair of contingencies is healthy (ārogya) and sickness (roga). When we are healthy and strong, we are happy and attached to this pleasant contingency. Sometimes we feel ill, cannot eat or sleep; this is the nature of life which we cannot escape.

Another pair of worldly contingencies is higher (ucca) and lower (nīca). Your mind should not flutter because you may have a higher or lower education, rank, quality, etc. The nature of a human being is to be happy and attach to the highest title, rank or quality with greed. Sometimes, when we are lower down, we suffer and attach to the situation with anger. We must not approach the right pleasant side, nor the left unpleasant site, but go the Middle Way.

Association (sampayogo) and separation (vippayago) is another pair of contingencies. When we associate with the beloved person, we are very happy because of the pleasantness of the situation. However, within a hundred years we are sure to be separated from each other. At that time we will feel suffering, sorrow and lamentation. This is the worldly nature. Sometimes we feel suffering because we associate with a fool. Later, we feel happiness because we are separated from him. Train your mind well not to waver. This is the teaching of the Buddha.

The next contingency is freedom (vimutta) and bondage (bandhana). There are many kinds of bondage. Sometimes people have to serve in their job or in a military position for a certain period of time without leaving. Prisoners in jail suffer in bondage, but when they are released, they feel very happy. We all like freedom, but here we should understand that real bondage is attachment. In the continuity of life we are running from life to life: lower to higher like from a woeful state to a celestial state, and higher to lower like

from a human to an animal state. This is because of bondage. The real meaning of freedom is freedom from bondage.

The last extra contingency is love (piya) and hate (appiya). It is our nature to attach to pleasant and unpleasant things. Thus, we attach to love with craving and to hate with anger. We do not dis-attach to hate, but we really attach to it. I would like to interpret that as a bad attachment. For example, there may be person you hate or perhaps you have an enemy that causes danger to you. You may dream about this person or never forget your enemy; this is an unpleasant attachment. If we can totally eradicate craving and hatred, our mind is free from love and hate. At that time we will be going on the Middle Way.

The Thirty-Sixth Highest Blessing: ***"Sorrowless".***

This blessing means to be without sorrow, inner furrow, consuming of the heart, lamentation, and excitement. In order to attain this blessing we should first understand and study the cause of sorrow. Only then will we naturally understand being without sorrow.

Attachment is the cause of sorrow and sorrow is the effect of our attachment. For example, when a person that we know or love dies, we feel sorrow. The death is not the cause of this sorrow. The attachment that we had to this dead person is the cause of the sorrow. When you look in the newspaper obituary section, you see that many people

are listed as having died. We never feel sorrow for these people, and that is because we had no attachment to them.

Craving, desire and greed are the cause of our attachment to our possessions. If any of our property is lost, destroyed, stolen or damaged, it is because of our attachment, thirsty craving and desire for this property that will cause us sorrow. So, attachment is the cause and sorrow is the effect.

We should lead our life according the law of nature of cause (hetu) and effect (phala) without either attachment or detachment to anything. To attain this blessing of sorrow less ness, we should eradicate the causes of sorrow, attachment (upādi), greed (lobha), craving (taṇhā) and desire (rāga). By the practice of Vipassanā mediation we can sever the causes of sorrow at the root and gain this blessing by our own endeavor.

The Thirty-Seventh Highest Blessing: *"Stainless".*

Exactly what is meant as stained? According to the commentary, there are three stains of our mind — desire, hate and delusion. If our mind is stained with any of these three, the mind is dull or never sharp.

For example, if you have a stainless steel knife, it is very bright and sharp because it is without any stains. If the knife becomes stained, it will not be as bright or sharp. Our mind is just like this knife because originally the mind of a human being is very bright and sharp, but as the mind becomes

stained with defilements, we cannot penetrate anything. When we remove these three kinds of stains by the practice of Samādhi and Vipassanā, at that time our mind will become pure and sharp because we will be without defilement or impurities. The mind once again will become clear, bright, sharp and stainless.

The Thirty-Eighth Highest Blessing: ***"Secure".***

The final blessing means a safe and secure place free from danger. When we arrive at this place, free from danger, suffering, sorrow, lamentation, rebirth, decay, disease and death, this is the attainment of Nibbāna.

When you attain Nibbāna, there is nothing more to do because there is no more rebirth, decay, disease, death, craving, hatred, delusion and illusion. Nibbāna is peaceful, everlasting. However, many materialistic people like something to do at every moment. Someone once asked me, "Venerable Sir, when we attain the Nibbāna, what shall we do?" Another person asked, "When I arrive in Nibbāna can I have a cigarette?" Given the explanation that there is nothing else to do, they responded that they would not like Nibbāna because their hobby is to always do something. Because of their emotional level some people do not understand that Nibbāna is very good.

Nibbāna is a very secure and safe place, free from all kinds of defilements and suffering. There is no more danger (birth,

decay, disease and death) and no more enemies (greed, hatred and delusion). It is real and everlasting happiness. The final peace of Nibbāna, this is our goal.

Conclusion

After expounding the thirty-eight blessings, the Buddha concluded with this stanza. To them, fulfilling matters such as these, everywhere invincible, in every way moving happily. These are the highest blessings.

To those who act according to the thirty-eight blessings, beginning with "not to associate with the fools", practicing and understanding each of them well, one will succeed in life. It is by the power of the practice of these blessings that throughout every corner of the world and on any occasion one will never be defeated by enemies, neither internally nor externally.

It is by the power of the practice of these blessings that throughout every corner of the world and on any occasion one will go in safety, not harassed, secure and fearless because of the absence of the vexations that would have arisen in him when associating with fools.

It is by the power of the practice of these blessings that throughout every corner of the world and on any occasion

one will attain happiness, peace, success and fame in this very life and in future lives until the Nibbāna.

To those who practice the thirty-eight blessings these are the Highest Blessings the most Auspicious Blessings. This concludes my teaching of the Maṅgala Sutta.

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Synopsis

And so completes the map the Buddha laid out for our journey to the summit of Mount Maṅgala. Following this Path of thirty-eight blessings, we strengthen and stabilize our minds; we defeat the enemies of greed, hatred and delusion and we protect ourselves from all disturbances.

Our journey begins at the base of the mountain by simply choosing to associate with the right friends and keep away from those who are foolish. By associating with wise ones, we absorb their goodness much in the same way a chameleon changes into the color of its surroundings.

The next step of the journey is in choosing the right place. With peace and tranquility in our environment, we allow our minds the space in which to purify it. In the ideal space, we also give opportunities for meritorious actions from the past to ripen. Together, they put us on the right track to happiness.

As we climb higher, having the right friends and residing in the right place, we are now ripe for learning and knowledge. Knowledge is not just limited to the Teachings of the Buddha, but also general knowledge, like sciences, arts, math, current affairs, etc. With the wisdom that comes from this well rounded knowledge, we are then able to speak pleasantly by not lying, not having harsh speech, not being malicious and slanderous, and not speaking frivolously; our speech becomes pleasing to others.

During the next step of our journey, we are advised on how to conduct ourselves in regards to our parents, spouses and children, supporting them in their basic needs, managing household affairs, providing food, clothing, lodging and money if necessary. In our daily occupations, while they may be good, we must also remember not to inconvenience others, not to disturb others, and not to be the cause of their suffering.

Next, we learn that morality is an important step on the climb to the summit. We are admonished to donate freely with loving kindness, compassion, wisdom and confidence. We are also admonished to also extend our support to our extended families, much as we would do with our parents and immediate loved ones. We should also be aware of our actions, not to be offensive or blameworthy.

Now we look to purifying our own behavior and developing sati. We cease and abstain from evil deeds, speech and thought. We abstain from taking intoxicating substances, not because they are inherently evil, but because they cause us to lose our guard, let down our defenses so that we are more likely to commit unwholesome, blameworthy acts.

With the discipline that comes from constant mindfulness, we endeavor to maintain a high level of dignity by becoming reverent, humble, content and gracious. With the strength of mindfulness and humility in demeanor, we know when the time is right for hearing the Dhamma.

The next step is in regards to our receptiveness. With patience and an open mind, we become easy to teach, not argumentative or holding tenaciously to our views, whether they are right or wrong. We feel inspiration from the sight of pure seekers of the Path, the recluses in the yellow robes. While we have the energy, fervor, and inspiration for wanting to talk about Dhamma, we know the appropriate time for said discussions.

Now that the Dhamma is in our hearts, we can further our mental development through self-control, not only mentally, but also in deed and speech. We practice diligently the Eightfold Noble Path and develop our loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity. Our understanding of the Four Noble Truths deepens and becomes more intuitive and with this understanding, we reach the highest peaks of wisdom of Mount Maṅgala — Nibbāna.

While these blessings have been taught sequentially and presented as steps up the side of a mountain, they are in fact interrelated. For example, when one develops patience (khanti), it is easier to perfect reverence (gāravo), humility (nivāto) and contentment (santhuṭṭī), which in turn leads naturally to respecting and supporting elders, parents, teachers and family, which in turn assists in the purification of actions, speech and thoughts, etc.

In short, the thirty-eight blessings in this Sutta are just an expansion of the Eightfold Noble Path, whose three parts are comprised of morality (sīla), concentration or mental

development (samādhi), and wisdom (paññā). But this journey is not just a literary exercise in that reading it alone will take you to Nibbāna any more than memorizing a highway map will take you to your destination. It is incumbent upon you to walk this Path and to put into practice these blessings. Then and only then will you gain the insight and intuitive understanding of the true Path of freedom from suffering and liberation to reach the final destination of Nibbāna.

May all beings who are suffering be free from suffering,
May all beings who are ill be free from illness;
May all beings who are sorrowful be free from sorrow,
May all beings be happy.

Venerable Ashin Sopāka
Sītagū International Buddhist Academy
January 29, 2008

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May the Dhamma prevail in the
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